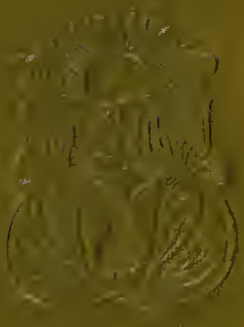

SAVOUR OF SALT

SAVOUR OF SALT

By
FLORENCE RANDAL LIVESAY
Author of
"Songs of Ukraina" and "Shepherd's Purse"

"Till your salt have lost its savour
And your virgin soil be cropped."
PADRAIC COLUM.

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TO MY MOTHER

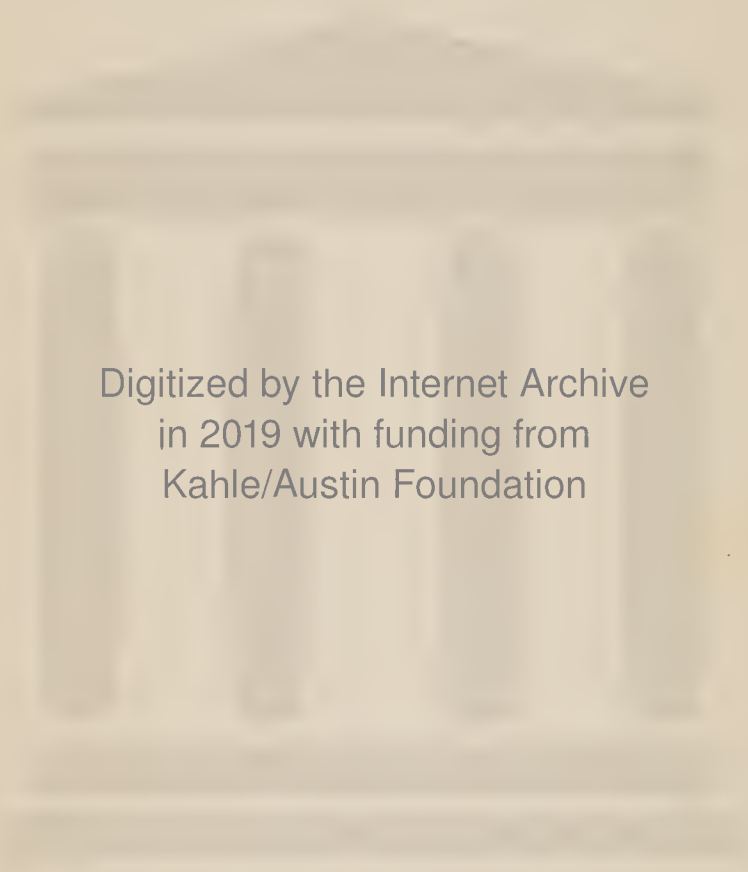
"The sisters and brother followed the trail to the head of the lake where they soon came on a little log hut in the midst of blooming flowers, and one of the sisters said: 'We are at the end of our journey. I know it by these flowers.'"

This might be the beginning or ending of a fairy tale instead of a bit from Ontario pioneer recounting. The seeds sown by a Pennsylvanian, in 1787, sent him by his mother, led his sisters, shipwrecked in Niagara, ignorant of his home's location, straight to the spot.

To-day the lilacs growing by deserted log cabins; the gnarled apple-trees, planted by some long-dead wife and mother; the Johnny-jump-ups thick in the long grass on the tiny unmarked mound in the neglected orchard, or in forgotten graveyards; the Lombardy poplars, first sign of a new home; avenues of pines, great oaks, maples, elms, hickory-trees; the stone houses, beautiful as when they were set up in their simple, dignified lines by the hands of craftsmen who loved their work—all these, to middle-aged Canadians, need only be mentioned, and the hills and fruitful acres of that gracious province of Ontario, with its British and American traditions, are seen in haunting, loving vision — retrospective and prophetic—a Motherland.

F. R. L.

TORONTO, ONTARIO.



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PART I

PART I

THE CHILD OF TWILIGHT

This being a story of Irish people in a Canadian setting—and very special Irish, at that—it will not matter in the least if this Introductory Chapter is not read until after the Epilogue! But I would be a little sorry if it were "skipped" entirely. —F. R. L.

Sometimes, when her granny was angry over some task undone, she would say to Aine: "Ovoch, you've been padrowlin' about the bush! You're a lazy, sthronshuch of a girl. No cuttin' up with your dardeols, miss!"

"Dardeols" . . . it was a queer old Irish word, and it made her shiver when she saw the insect itself. Once, when her brother Jim had come in tired from work, he had said: "Pat has got his dardeols out. He's quarrelsome enough t'day."

Black-beetles—cockroaches—were said to be unlucky and poisonous: ruthlessly they were to be set upon—and burnt, Aine was told. "A Friday's fast is not better for you than to burn a dardeol." That was the old Irish proverb often quoted by Mrs. Finnigan, whose adopted child she was. All the same, it did seem so cruel.

Then there was the question of snakes. The old Irish in Ontario had very definite views as to what must be done with them. They often sung to them when they met them in the woods in the summer, stepping to a croon

or rhythmic chant: "Braghty, Braghty, Braghty!" (which meant "spotted") "under the ashing leaves." But in spring it was different. "Kill the first snake you see in spring and you will have good luck," or, as it ran in a little rhyme:

You pluck the first blow,
Break the first brake,
Kill the first snake,
You'll do anything you undertake.

Aine's mother had said: "Never kill a snake when it is singing." No, she could not have done that, anyway. In the lovely spring evenings she had heard them once or twice and had said to her little cousin: "Snakes have the beautifullest voice, I think. Their music bothers you at first till they get started singing and then it's so fine and tiny you like to listen to it—it's funny to hear." Ted, who was only five, always agreed with her. But he had no love for snakes if he saw them, though some day his turn would come to kill the first one. So had the dreadful moment come for Aine.

By a hole near the gate-post it was, seeming to wait for her passing by; it never glided away at the sight of her, but, basking in the sun, it lifted its head and hissed when she came near. When at last she told her mother that this had happened for some days, that authority—whom none might disobey—said: "You must kill it—it means you have an enemy." So, with a stick, she drove it half-way into a hollow log; then took an axe and dispatched it. They said it would not die till sundown, so she watched it carefully at intervals. Seeming

dead, it might have wriggled away. Well, all her enemies had been killed for a year! That was some comfort.

On another memorable occasion there was significant mention of "a bad member in the family." "The Boobrie Bird"—if Aine's mother ever heard its weird call in the Ontario woods all the household trembled with her. In it a spirit dwelt.[1] *It was so seldom seen that it was almost a mythical "animal with four legs, but you only saw two." (One day in an abandoned gravel-pit a "Boobrie Bird" was found. Old Father O'Shea was sent for in hot haste. He had spent his childhood in Ireland—he was taking no chances on "a bad member in the household." "As soon as you get the ground dug for that one the better! There's 'Pishrogue' here! Bury it far in the fields." Witchcraft! O—oh! Aine shivered in childish delighted fashion.)*

Crickets Aine knew to be enchanted, and lucky to have about the house. If you did by chance kill one, some of its kin would come in revenge and eat your blankets and woollen dresses. So every "witchy-woman" of her acquaintance saw to it that beneath her salt-box stood a bottle of holy water, to keep the place purified and to warn off the crickets. For, on a certain day they were not safe, and they might as well know it. On the morning of the Feast of St. Fintan (3rd January) Aine's mother said it was quite all right to kill them. She poured boiling water down their holes and cried:

"If you come for luck, stay!
If not, I warn you away!"

[1] *The bittern; Ontario pioneers considered its cry ominous of death.*

In little Aine's ears the cricket's song was always mysterious, a portent: "We are trying to tell you what the fairy music is like, some day you will hear it"—so the croon went on as she sat drowsily by the fire.

Then there was the charm of the Red Thread:

Rowan tree and red thread
Put the witches to their speed.

Just as soon as the first brood of her mother's turkeys chipped their shells the red thread had to be tied around their necks: the gobbler ("Turkey Tom") already had his red thread in the shape of his wattles. He, though, might have a "holy medal" hung about him so that he might not eat the rowan-berries and grow "drunk" or dizzy with them.

There were—for thoughtful consideration on long summer days—the "Fires of the Fairies," little charred patches in the grass sometimes seen by the farmers, and always with fear, for they meant loss in some form. These needed some drenching with holy water, Aine firmly believed, after one day in which, unwittingly, she took great chances. Armed with a stick, she poked around them. She was dragged home, lamenting loudly. Didn't she know she might have been struck by the fairies? Made into a "dummy" maybe. After sundown she must not go near the flax-field, for the Good People would be at their work and would not want to be disturbed.

When it came to real people they too wore cloaks of mystery. By one of the giant rocks which "grew," as they said, from year to year (and you could well believe

it, so much space did it cover), an old crone was often to be seen chipping off fine flakes which she reduced to powder and put in a little pail hanging at her side. She owned the stone, so she had a perfect right to do this, of course, if she felt so inclined. But she was a woman with a Mission. Wherever there was a nursing-mother, for miles around, this old dame would be seen: "Put a spoonful of this powder on your tongue, little mother, and 'tis you will not be wantin' milk for your child."

"She must get lots of money for her crushed stone," said Aine once to her mother, who rebuked her sharply for such a thought.

"'Tis a kind deed: she would take no money for it or her 'cure' would be no good at all, at all. How it started was like this. When Our Lady was nursing the little Jesus she sat down on just such a stone, and some drops fell on it and so it became a 'cure.' The lungwort has almost the same story. You can see the funny look on its leaves where the milk spilt. Belike it was growing near the stone."

"The Yella Highway Man!" Oh, but he was a very *shivery sort of person to meet, or to hear talked about! The Yella Highway meant any spot that was known to be haunted, and so they called old man Flannery by the name that suggested uncanny knowledge. He knew enough about that sort of thing!* Bellow-trees, *for instance. Why, people would send miles for him to come to their bush-lots and pick out the "baylurch" (tamarack) or the other "bellow"-trees, which must never be cut down, for they*

were sacred in some way. You could tell secrets to them, making a slit in the bark. There might be a hollow trunk down which you could drop a holy medal; some old Irishwomen would tramp miles to scratch a cross with a hairpin on a tree marked out by the Yella Highway Man. Once Aine's cousin Lily took the sharp point of a shoe-lace and scratched a faint little cross on a certain tree—where, when Aine was lost, one spring day, she saw the very, very tall man. The Yella Highway Man hinted that he lived in the tree, in purgatory; no one else ever saw him.

Aine hated worst of all the thought of the pastures at dusk. Through all the ten years of her life there were strange enough inhibitions, commands laid on her not lightly to be disregarded, absolutely without seeming reason; there were suggestions, hints . . . one might never ask questions, and the Irishwomen talking with her granny would be very angry if they caught her listening to their gossip.

The cow's teeth, now! These were what she dreaded to find. A careless footstep and she might uncover "Daisy's" teeth. Horrible thought! Whenever a cow died or was killed the men of the farm hastened to take out its teeth, and bury them, at night, in a field and silently. In the old days cows could talk. That was why to-day they buried the teeth—so they couldn't talk back.[1]

Of course a cow was a blessed creature, and you might not, being a sinner, strike its flanks with your hand; it wouldn't matter if you used a three-inch stick. Horses,

[1] *Cf. the carchall or burial of a misfortune.*—Irish Legendary Lore.

too, were blessed (as well as the sheep, which could never be touched by the fairies), for Our Lord was born in a manger. If a man was dying who had lost everything but his horse—Aine had heard her brother Jim say—he would repeat the last words of the horse, "Bury my bleached bones with you." And his friends would see to it that the bones of the animal, when it died, were placed just outside the cemetery, as near to the man's grave as possible. The braided mane, like a fringe, would be kept to adorn the border of the calendar, in remembrance; sometimes the leg of a horse was hung up in an outhouse, for the same reason.

When a death in the family was imminent the favourite horse, it was said, came to the window, and suppose, thought Aine, when you were out at dusk, you met a horse on its way to a death-bed—Milly, the well-loved little pacer, for instance! . . .

"Will I ever hear Milly neighing?"

She asked her mother that one day when she was pondering over the death of her pet mare; she had not been told of the occurrence for ten days and then learned of it through a neighbour's chance word. Later it appeared that on the Night of the Big Much (Shrove Tuesday Night) Milly's shoe had been found by the door —a sure sign of bad luck, and no one of the family would think of mentioning the death of the horse to Aine. The news must come to her through an outside source.

There was something queer about Milly's dying. The priest had wanted to buy her, for he said he needed a

speedy mare on his rounds and tired enough he was of chirruping to his stumbling roan; but Jim would not sell her. Two days after the refusal she was found dead in her stall. Two men had buried Milly at once, very deep.

Her mother told Aine that if she went into the stable at midnight she could hear Milly neighing. She had not the slightest intention of going near the stable, by day or night. Horses were too much like humans; they were always with people. When a pet horse was sold, the old people would throw earth upon it and mutter a charm which meant, "See that you come back to the old place when you are dead."

Plenty of festive days, festive in a religious sense, were part of Aine's childish memories.

Aine had a special fondness for St. Brigid because it was told of her that she fell asleep during a sermon that St. Patrick gave. Of course, the saint spoke for fourteen days and nights and it was natural enough St. Brigid should grow sleepy; but it argued a certain human fallibility. Then there was the story of the clever way she got ahead of the stingy old King of Leinster. He would give her only as much land as she could cover with her cloak, would he, then? St. Brigid just called in four virgins who took the corners of her cloak. And how it stretched! Over the whole of County Wexford, about twenty miles square.

Sometimes when Aine was laboriously practising she

thought of St. Brigid and the princes who could not play on the harp. The saint "touched the fingers of the princes" and always thereafter they played divinely. If only the saint would appear to her!

Why hadn't she been a Brigid, like her cousin, called after mother and grandmother? Then she could have gone to the party on St. Brigid's Eve, with the grown-up girls or women named after the saint, and relatives of theirs. She had helped to gather bulrushes in the late summer, "against St. Brigid's Eve" (31st January). One had to pull them—they must never be cut.

On the great night, at her aunt's house, for instance, all invited would be assembling for the feast. A knock at the door: "May St. Brigid come in?" "Yes, she may," Aunt Maggie would answer, looking up from the preparation of pancakes. Into one of these she would have dropped a little cross of the dried bulrush. Someone, very lucky, would get this cake, as she drank the buttermilk set before her in the wooden firkin, fashioned like a little churn. After many congratulations the rush-cross would be proudly taken home and placed over the bed of the fortunate Brigid.

On one memorable occasion Auntie McCool was asked to come and recite St. Brigid's "office." It was known that she could do this in Irish, "rhymin' it off like a good one." According to Brigid's account proceedings were exhilarating. For forty years Auntie had worn a pair of spectacles with only one glass in them. After racing through the "office" to the company's great admiration she stood still, "in a rale, uplifted sort of

way," and cried, as if transfixed: "I can see the blessed saint this very minute!"

Aine objected that if Auntie could be asked her small niece might have gone too. "Her name isn't Brigid." "Oh, well, she has a daughter Brigid," she was told. "That was near enough when they wanted her so badly: she was more fun than enough." Aine always seemed to miss any fun that was going.

The joys of Christmas were short-lived, and, before it came, the paper garlands wreathing each room, all pinked out and ruffled, meant hours of work; it seemed too bad that on the Night of the Big Much these must all be burned. They made the fire with which the roasts were cooked for the big supper—that wonderful event of the year when fat boys, filled to repletion, sighed because they could eat no more; when children woke in the night howling with stomach-ache.

On that night there must be "everything in the house," or it would mean that you would go hungry for a whole year. The Finnigan family had to eat everything put before them—a slice of pork, of fowl, of lamb, of beef; all kinds of vegetables; all kinds of sweet things. Dinner at noon as usual; then the long wait till nine at night for the big supper. Of course she was certainly hungry enough when she sat down to it, but by and by she wished, —O she wished she hadn't eaten quite so much! That last morsel of pastry, that last drink of buttermilk. Mortal child has its limits—but mothers in the Settlement on the Fermoy Line could not seem to recognise it on that night.

"To-morrow morning!" Ah, then pretty Brigid Cassidy would smooth back her hair demurely and bind a bit of gauze about her brows. Father O'Shea would tolerate no hats on that solemn occasion. Aine, too, would kneel with the cross of ashes marked on her brow —she was not allowed to put water on her face all day, for fear she might wash off the mark. At the breakfast-table she was given a rowan-berry to eat. It was considered to have medicinal qualities.

On Ash Wednesday Mrs. Finnigan, facing Lent, scowled as she saw the remains of her fine cooking, pasties and delicacies. "They do be growlin' at me," she said, ruefully enough.

Would there be no one to finish them? Aine was a child—she did not have to fast—but—though to-day nothing tempted her, there was always To-morrow, when she might perhaps eat a mouthful, even be hungry at the sight of a rather dejected-looking cold roast of beef.

PROLOGUE

It was the Twelfth of July. In the pioneer settlements of Ontario the year had two fateful "Donnybrook" days—the Twelfth, when the sun spilt a golden, saffron, tawny light over the countryside for the benefit of the Orange "Walk" in the nearest big town, and the "Sivinteenth of Ireland," when the "Fermoy Line" [1] rose to the occasion and painted the place as green as grass.

Some of the fervour and passion—almost all of it, in fact—had died out with the passing of the pioneers and their sons; but the tradition remained; and the celebration was still a proud obligation for the Protestants on the day when little Aine Finnigan, seven years old, stole out of the farmhouse unobserved immediately after breakfast and took up her station by the gate. There she waited impatiently for the first sign of the passing of the "Nazareth Line" contingent, who might be making an early start for Erinveyne. How she wished she might get a glimpse of the Marshal on the White Horse and the marching Orangemen, in panoply and pride and beating of drums.

At intervals she looked back anxiously at the shrouded windows of the gabled brick house. The

[1] The lines and concessions block out the Ontario countryside in real estate surveys.

"help" was busy over after-breakfast chores. But Ma might be upstairs, glancing out of a point of vantage.

The blinds were down in the parlour, naturally—to keep out the sun and also to preserve the proper lack of interest in what the Nazareth Line families did on their great day with regard to the decking out of their horses with orange ribbons and the like.

Very slowly the caparisoned steeds would amble past the Finnigan homestead, be sure of that. There might be, for contrast, some of the new "Divil's cars," going at the rate of fifteen miles an hour.

It would be a daring child who openly watched the preliminaries for the assemblage at an Orange walk. Where the road made a sharp turn, a tall pine-tree quivered in a strange fashion as a small boy swung himself up neatly, quite out of harm's way. That, of course, was the trouble with being a girl. Aine was crouching behind the bushy screen of lilac and syringa, and she was not at all sure about the line of vision from the kitchen-window.

The house, solid and fine, third in descent from the pioneer log hut, was attractive, with its design of decorative brick and its fantastic carvings on gables, porches and verandah, painted white. These always made Aine think of the nursery song: "Four and twenty thousand trinkum-trankums." A nice, comfortable home it was, almost overshadowed by the huge unpainted barn with its splendid stone foundation. Snake fences, winding in and out in their

picturesque lazy fashion, marked out the pasture, while other acres had boundaries of stumps—great sprawling barriers, roots of trees overgrown by traveller's joy and wild grape. A fertile, beautiful part of Ontario, cleared long ago, yet thickly wooded still; blue hills in the far distance.

The "bush" near by, with its sugar maples and birches, was dark and mysterious even on this wonderful, radiant summer day. Into it the pioneer women ventured often at their peril, as they entered "five acres of raspberries to get the full of their pail." Often enough they got lost and only the faint echo of a horn saved them. Aine had been warned that there was danger still.

Yet raspberries, and especially those growing in the delightful shade of the bush, were always very tempting to the child, who thought longingly of them as she crouched in her hiding-place. Would they be ripe now? Did she dare to relieve the tedium of waiting by running into the trees for a few minutes? No, dew was still on the grass. Ma would certainly find out.

Just then a lady, still pretty in spite of a rather lined and anxious face, dressed in lilac-rose sprigged muslin and wearing a large sun-hat, came up the road. She walked in a determined way, not in haste; and she paused at the gate as if she was certain of her destination. Somehow Aine knew at once that she had no intention of going up to the front door.

"I don't believe I know what your name is, little girl, and yet I am sure I have seen you before. Aren't

you Mrs. Finnigan's daughter? What do they call you, I wonder?"

"Aine," the child answered, regarding her in surprise.

"Oh, what a shame! The priest called you that after all. He was so determined because he liked it. I've not a drop of Irish blood in me, thank goodness. Your name should have been— Oh, well, never mind. It does not matter. Only I shall not call you by that outlandish *Ainia*. 'Lorraine' will do for the time. See, I am going for a walk and you can pick berries if you come with me, all day long. We'll have lunch on the way, and there will be candies for you."

Aine hesitated. All day? "Oh, I couldn't do that! Ma wouldn't let me."

"No—no. I mean it might *seem* like all day. No one counts time when picking berries. You know all the good patches. Show me them along the road . . Lorraine."

Aine was very obliging, and pleased that her knowledge was appreciated, though somewhat doubtful about answering to her new name. She walked by the side of the pretty lady for a long time. Then, glutted at last with the feast, she wanted to turn back. She did not know where she was—the road had twisted so often. They had crossed a brook somewhere. It was high noon, and the sun was burning her arms and neck.

"We will have lunch and take a long rest," said the lady. And she produced from a paper bag delicious

sandwiches and little tarts, cakes, even weak tea in a bottle.

After a nap under a shady tree they went on—it was terribly hot, but the lady would not take a drive when a man offered them a lift. Aine cried when he clicked to his horses and they went slowly out of sight in a cloud of dust.

It was almost evening when they reached a large town, the child half dead with fatigue. The lady, who had asked so many questions about the Finnigan farm and its owner—Was Aine happy all day long? Did Mrs. Finnigan ever beat her? They'd better not try any of that sort of thing or she'd take the dear child away—had fallen into a brooding silence which had lasted for hours; no tearful pleadings roused her from her dazed reverie.

She shook off little Aine's clinging, moist hand; her dragging feet vexed her.

Reaching a house with green shutters, she said: "Rest here on these steps till I come back. Don't move from the spot."

Aine woke from her drugged slumber an hour later to find someone bending over her. "I'll take her to the Children's Aid Shelter," a man's voice murmured in her ears. And he carried her in his arms a short distance.

Some time the next day Auntie McCool arrived with a rag doll which she had made for Aine. And they went back to the Finnigan farm on the train. It had been an adventure; Aine was perfectly happy with her new possession. She had never had a doll before.

THE BIRD'S-FOOT SIGN ON MAY-DAY MORNING

EARLY it was on May-day morning in one of those long-ago springs when days were always golden and one could be sure of flowers with which to deck the statues of the saints. But if the day held out great joys it had yet its dangers if you happened to live in certain districts of Ontario where the pioneer Irish made their homes, and where their descendants keep up the old traditions. May Day had a fascination of its own; even though some of the old rites were dying out, little Canadian children were kept in a mood of delightful apprehension on that day.

Had they not heard from the old grannies of the Settlement of the necessity of watching in the cow-sheds at dawn, in couples, lest ill should befall the cattle? All day long the old women must sit and smoke interminable pipes, for were not the fairies ready to steal little children and fine cows? They must watch the latter at milking-time and tie cowslips on their tails; must put a spent coal under the churn. As for the children, Granny would see that a scapular containing words from the Gospels was securely fastened about their necks, thus putting them, as she believed, under the protection of "Our Lady."

Hawthorn and mountain-ash were wreathed above the cows' stalls; fires were not allowed to die out; the luck of the year would be given away if one lent milk or fire or salt. Oh, there were ever so many "ifs" and "buts" on this particular day, and it behoved all children to walk warily indeed!

Aine Finnigan had often heard "Auntie" McCool talking about old charms—she had seen once the bit of foxglove wrapped in black cloth between the leaves of Auntie's prayer-book. It was a spell against witches; the flowers must have been gathered on May-day eve; if the blossoms appeared later in the month there would be no charm in it at all. So with fire and salt—Aine must be taught that they would keep evil things far. She understood at last why the old Herb-doctor had said that when he came to die he must be buried with a little plate of salt on his breast. He had once given a small girl a leaf of ground-ivy, telling her solemnly to eat it. Aine tried it, but did not find herself changed in any noticeable way. However, signs and charms often went unaccountably wrong, she was sure of that.

For instance, here was May-day morning, and ashes strewn on the threshold as usual the night before. What had she seen when she rose early and peeped out to see if there was trace of a footmark? Did it point inward, that would mean marriage; if outward, death. So far, she had never been able to see any "sign" at all. But to-day the tiny marks of a bird's foot were plainly discernible.

When she told her mother of her discovery the latter said it meant a visitor "for no long stay." "It will be Cousin Agnes coming from Niagara," said Aine, delightedly. But instead it was—oh, who do you think it really was? Old Auntie McCool, if you please, expectant of a hearty welcome, come for the whole summer, or until the berries were picked. No bird's visit for her.

With a sinking heart Aine saw her trudging up the road from the station; in her usual queer fashion she held her capacious bag of old green worsted, the top pouched over into a knob. The little girl knew exactly what was in it — seventeen pretty coloured aprons, rolled up tight, a brush and comb, nightgown, a loaf of bread, some starch, and of course the photographs which always accompanied Auntie on her travels. Mrs. McCool had seen her old pioneer farm sold in spite of her weeping protest; she had not saved much to take with her to her new home in the States. But she treasured all the likenesses of friends and relatives, and would tell any chance stranger of their faults and failings as long as he would listen. She tacked them on the walls, when on her visitations, and wrote beneath the faces of the dead whom she disliked, "Brimstone for her!" Another article which she always brought with her was "the half of a broom"—her "witchgrass" broom which, in pioneer days, she had made herself.

"Eh, now, 'tis the grand marnin' for May Day. Were ye expecting me, Janey dear?"

With her usual perverseness "Auntie" persisted in calling Aine by this commonplace variation of a name which the child in her secret heart delighted in, because it was "different."

Father O'Shea once said to her: "You've the grand name, did you but know it—what a king's daughter was proud to be called by. There's old songs about it—'Aine, the High King's Daughter, ah, she was fair to see.' I have liked the sound of it all my life, ever since I heard it. People will not forget you once they've heard it. Ain-e! say it soft-like, and you feel rain falling on the turf in the old land; Ainia! and you'll hold your head high, with the pride of a princess in your eyes. Mind this now; I gave you that name; see that you don't disgrace it."

But, of necessity, she had to answer to "Janey" when Mrs. McCool addressed her.

"There was a bird's footmark in the ashes," she said gravely. "They say it means someone coming for a short visit."

"Nothing of the sort—the divil mend ye! It has no manin' whatsoever, and well your mother knows ut."

Mrs. McCool, whose temper was easily roused, and as quickly allayed, brushed past the child and entered the house.

"Now was it yersilf was hintin' to that brat of yours, Janey, that I'd just put my fut in the dure and take it out again? You know me better nor thot. Here I am with a fine loaf to your tastin' and me bit of starch when I wash out me aperns, and me lace

collar I've had this twenty year, and for starchin' your curtings. And is there anny reason why I shouldn't be berryin' with ye as I have these fifteen year? Sure it's aisy seen the curtings nade me handlin'. They niver look tasty-loike till I come to stretch thim well. 'Tis the limp rags they are this minute."

"Bring out Auntie's rocking-chair and put it in the centre of the floor that she may sit and rest and rock a bit, the way she is always wishful to do."

Little Aine hastened to obey, but Auntie took no notice of the proffered chair. Standing in the doorway she cried: "Is that wan of thim agents pattin' your Jim on the back tryin' to sell him an incubator?"

"You might send him away," said Mrs. Finnigan with a laugh. "'Tis a great tongue you have on you."

"I will thot." She ran out like a whirlwind. "Is ut a Protestant ye are, young man?"

"Yes, ma'am," he said, surprised enough.

"Then your religion is just loike your machine there —patent-made—and ye'd best be takin' both off the premises. Now don't be botherin' good people to-day Ye wouldn't be afther knowin', av coorse, that a blessed holiday is this day—the first day of Our Lady's month—but ye havin' a poor patent-religion wouldn't know the differ. All the same ye're wastin' yer toime here. Be off with ye! Gasoline's goin' to be done with soon, ye'll be done with too! We'll hear the last of ye! Well, he's gone, bed cess to him."

Mrs. McCool came back with a brisk step, triumphant. Mrs. Finnigan looked at her curiously. "What's

that ye've got in your mouth, woman dear? A bit of gum?"

"'Tis a bit of string I'm chewin'—better thot, ye'll say, than chewin' the rag, as I was just now. And small thanks I'm gettin' for me trouble from annywan in this house!"

"Come now and have a bite to eat—it's good bacon in the pan."

"'Tis the heart-scald I'll have if I stay here!"

Mrs. McCool, suddenly and incomprehensibly enraged, after her fashion, had put her faded black shawl over her head and was off to pay long gossiping calls on neighbours.

Aine knew that she would surely be back by the evening, and she knew only too well what was in store for herself that night. She would have to sleep with Auntie, and though spring nights were warm she would be covered thick with home-made hooked rugs from the floor, for Mrs. McCool was determined that "Janey" should not get cold from having to share the bedding.

Every year Mrs. McCool arrived for the berrying season (sometimes she anticipated the fruit harvest, it is true). When she preserved her berries she used Mrs. Finnigan's sealers and sugar and fire and then she distributed the jam to people in the village. These were usually poor people, but not necessarily worthy. Auntie liked reprobates, if they were appreciative. Sometimes as a Lady of Gifts she visited old friends, who suffered her to spend an afternoon with them

for the sake of fruit — her pickled wild leeks were famous, and she had a surprisingly good remedy for coughs made from herbs she found in the woods. The old lady was a feminine Robin Hood, in short. When she had inveigled from Mrs. Finnigan two lovely Paisley shawls which had belonged to her mother, Auntie promptly gave them away to "two poor dear ould women who needed thim worse nor you and I." She gloried in her admission when taxed with the deed. When she visited the village store her depredations there had the same aim—those who made a good profit should be forced to disgorge—and Auntie was highly regarded in many homes as a distributing agent.

Even the advent of Auntie McCool could not long cloud that beautiful spring day for little Aine, and soon she danced along to meet the group of children to pick flowers to decorate the statue of Our Lady. In the mind of each child there gleamed a white trillium as a banner leading them onward. In those days, as I have said, you did not set your heart on a certain flower and come back with dandelions; you found the trilliums early or late, the spring beauties and hepaticas. It was only a question of who should find the flowers first and so obtain the May-day "wish," which would be granted to the donor of the blossoms.

Among the trees just bursting into leaf Aine ran, ahead of all the rest, afraid of nothing, heedless of swale and brier. And it was she who found the first "lily" on the fringe of the wood. The other children

were far behind—it was high noon, and beneath a tree most of them sat down to arrange their treasures of the lesser sort.

Aine, penetrating ever deeper into the heart of the "bush," leaped lightly across a mossy log to pluck a tempting array of nodding blossoms. She filled her arms with their beloved purity. And she looked up to see, a little at one side, leaning against a tapering, slender young maple-tree, a very tall man in a black suit and high silk hat.

To Aine, in that first gasping moment of astonishment, he seemed as tall as the tree itself. His face wore a grave expression as he regarded her silently. But it was his height and the soft, velvety blackness of his clothes that stayed in her mind as she let the precious flowers drop from arms suddenly limp and powerless. She ran on and on, her feet sinking in the bog, her new lilac pinafore torn by the briers, her neck and arms scratched and bleeding. She shrieked in an agony of fear, calling the children long ago out of hearing, looking back to see if the man as tall as the tree was following her.

But when she grew hoarse and exhausted with crying, she heard a sound—only the sigh of the leaves of the young trees murmuring together, only the tapping of the woodpecker. The bird fascinated her by its quick movements around an old stump, and she watched it for a very long time . . . she fell asleep. When she woke it was late in the afternoon. Her wild screaming recommenced as she thought of

the terrors of the coming night. "Mamie! Bridget!" —her weak little voice did not carry very far.

A red fox passed her, loping along with tongue out. She thought it was a neighbour's dog, "Frisky," and called him vainly. She found some wild leeks and ate them, and, remembering expeditions with "Auntie," plucked some to take home for pickling. The fox, in her illusion, had given her comfort; she was sure her miles of running had brought her near home.

She ran on faster, refreshed by her long sleep. But it was not till the sky grew lemon-and-pink through the trees that she heard a familiar sound, faint cow-bells. Towards the tinkling she plunged, through thickets and bogs. And a far-away voice answered her frenzied cry.

Her brother, Joseph Henry ("J. H." for short), was not any too pleased to see her.

"Look at all the trouble you've given this day—not one bit of fun have we had. Ma's been cryin' in the kitchen with her apron over her head and all the people have been hunting, and I've spent hours shouting all over for you. And the cows—look how far they've strayed—we'd never have found them to-night if it hadn't been for their bells."

"Well, and you'd never have found me either but for the cows and their bells," sobbed Aine.

"Oh—you!" he answered with a sniff. "What's the use of girls anyway? Just like you to spoil a perfectly good May Day. You must have been deaf—the way I yelled! What do you think Auntie McCool has

been doing? She came home early, of course, hearing all about the row. And there was Ma cryin', and she sat down too and rocked away like mad, switching the floor in one of her furies with a willow-gad, just because Jim was out hunting for you in the car. You remember the day he took her round delivering her jam behind the racer instead of old Jessie, and the jars were half broken—you know she can't bear him now. Well, there she was cursing Jim for fair: ' Gone in the cyar, is he! The divil take him! May he niver come back aloive!' "

"Oh, you'd laugh, would you? Here, Ma! I found Aine; you ought to lick her for all the trouble she's given us this day."

Next morning Mrs. McCool listened to the oft-told story with a curious expression on her face. "It would be a man I heard tell of in the ould days. A rich family lived hereabouts then, and there was a tall young son—now what was it your granny said about the son? 'As tall as a gaddy maple,' that was it. 'Tis May Day, and what would you be afther expectin' at this time in the woods but to see the dead come back!"

"Did you ever see the dead come back?" whispered little Aine from the shelter of her mother's arms. "I don't think he could have been dead, but he looked different from anything I have ever seen—his high silk hat and his nice clothes, so black. But did your husband ever come back, Auntie?"

"Oh, ye're a parable, ye are! Just hould yer whisht, will ye! Shure an' I don't want me ould man back on

May Day or anny day—the world's well rid of him and so am I. Wisha, it was the sorry day I tied him to me apern-strings! But it all equals ye! Talk no more about it."

"I know. It was the bird's visit, the short visit of somebody, that I saw in the ashes," said Aine, in sudden illumination.

"If it was nothin' worse," Mrs. McCool muttered darkly. "It might be a sign you was to die, alanna. But May Day's past, and ye've not been bewitched. Had ye on yer scapular?"

Aine put her hands to her neck. In the bush the scapular had become loosened and had fallen off.

"Sure it's Our Lady's month," said Mrs. Finnigan. "And I won't have you frightening the child with your tales. The Blessed Mother was in the woods with you, dearie, when you were picking the flowers for her altar. She brought you home unhurted, so kneel you down with me and say 'Hail, Mary, full of grace.'"

THE LITTLE VOICES

"It's the lonesomest place whatever!" said Aine to her doll Bridget.

At first the excitement of there being a wake in her aunt's house had been thrilling beyond measure. For she remembered all the occurrences of the year before when her granny had died in Aine's own home; the stopping of the clock; the crowds of people arriving, and all the preparations made in the kitchen for the meals for an unknown quantity of people (for anyone was welcome to come to a wake, whether friends, acquaintances or strangers): tables filled and refilled, and over all the air of mysterious doings, fascinating to the imagination, almost as delightful as May-day celebrations or Christmas festivity.

And even to-day she need not go to school—she would not be "let." She need not, in fact must not, put a hand to the daily task of peeling potatoes. This was all cause for rejoicing, surely. On the other hand her mother had gone away to the aunt's farmhouse, and she was left alone. And she did hate to have the poor animals in the barnyard suffer for lack of care. How they bellowed for attention! She would have milk for her supper because her mother had said she might "strip" the cows, but none of the stock would

be watered or fed until her aunt's body was laid in the grave. In her aunt's barns no one would even milk the cows, unless some friend of the family would take it upon himself to offer his services; in every farmyard for miles around, owned by any relative of the dead woman, all work must cease, in respect for the dead.

Aine felt much more lonely because of the noise in the farmyard, a short distance across the fields, where the horses belonging to her uncle were neighing in their stalls; the dogs "a-goning" [1] in sympathy with the wailing of the old Irish women-mourners; the hens there would be disconsolate like those about her, anxiously scratching for seeds and looking for water.

No one cared about her, either, she thought. Her mother had said: "Don't go off the place to-day; don't touch a thing till we come home except what you have to get for your meals, lying ready for you there in the pantry. If you're a good girl I'll give you a gold bangle with a heart on it."

It reminded her of once at the convent, where she had spent a term in the city. A nun's wake was being held, and all the little pupils became suddenly of no consequence at all. It did not matter whether they were washed, or what they did. Sister St. Monica was dead; she was the only one to be regarded. All work must stop.

And now Aunt Liz was dead. She had heard two old women whispering about the rich heiress Aine was going to be when she grew up, now that Great-Aunt

[1] Keening.

Finnigan had gone. Of course it made you feel rather important for a while, thinking what you would do with all the money. But she was beginning to be hungry. She must go to the pantry and see what was there. But first she would have a run down the lane. All the fences were levelled on the road leading to Aunt Lizzie's door, so that the hearse and the many carriages could drive up to the threshold with no confusion. Now it was interesting to watch the "rigs" or motors which brought the people in veritable droves to the wake.

Aine sat down on a tree-stump at the end of the lane and thought of her fury of yesterday when Danny, the half-witted boy working on a neighbouring farm, had met her on his way to her aunt's house.

"Is the ould lady dead or whatever?" he said. "How long will ut be before the grand doin's is on? The boys in the village tellt me to come and ask if she'll hold out much longer. Sure, I can hardly wait. Niver have I seen a wake in the parts where I come from. I'm Propestant as they make 'em—wild Propestant, do ye mind thot?"

He had brandished a stick at her, as she fled howling to the house.

He was at the wake-house now, she supposed, eating all Aunt Lizzie's good smoked hams and fat chickens and baked bread and sweet cakes. Of course, she knew in her heart that everyone was the same about wakes. When it was dull for visitors in the country she had heard her own mother say: "It's a pity we couldn't

take you to a wake-house while you are here. Stay a little longer, several of the old people are failing. Tom McInnis might die any day now."

And she herself—What about going to stay with old ladies while the body was being taken to the church for the funeral service? Two little girls were always asked to stay with the old lady left behind to keep everything in readiness for the mourners when they came back. Aine, being a favourite with everyone, was often invited, and she would be remembered with a present when the farmer's wife sold her turkeys.

"I do like it, Bridget. It really is exciting. You stay there and you mustn't touch a thing, not the tiniest cake. But you know you'll get the best thing going when the rest come home. Do you remember the time I told you about when Molly Maguire locked me in the room where old man Fripp had just been lying dead? And no one should go in there for two days after the body had been taken out. And he might be around for nine days. I was so frightened I screamed, and the old lady broke her clay pipe as she hurried to me, and the cat in the kitchen set the old rocker creaking back and forth and it got its head in the milk-jug and banged it over the floor—and even Molly got scared for she thought her grandfather had come back. I guess Danny is like everyone else and likes excitement; probably he didn't mean any harm. Well, come on, Bridget; we'll get a pail and I'll go out to strip the cows."

Spring was in the air, and she had a country child's

healthy appetite. Looking round in the pantry, she found that the butter had been forgotten. However, there was fortunately plenty of cream ready for churning. That was it. She would make some butter. Her mother had shown her how long before. Wouldn't she be pleased when she came home and found it all done! But there was another Voice she heard; it cautioned and warned: "That is 'work' that must not be done while Aunt Lizzie's wake is being held." She sent it huddling into some dark corner of her mind and shut the door on it.

There was no one to give a hand with the churning and say, "God bless you all here!" She wished a stranger would come in, but there was no sign of one.

She thought of her old great-aunt who would never refuse food to anyone who came to her door. And she pictured herself as the woman of the house in a certain story she had once heard:

"Now I'm baking the bread on the stones and a stranger asks me for food. And I say I've nothing but the bread baking there and he must wait till it's done. And he says, 'What and if it was God's will that your bread there should be green grass?'

"And when I go to the oven to see, what is there in it but just salley-gads!"

There was another story of an Irish witch that she had read in an old book and which ran through her busy little mind, as the churn-dasher splashed up and down. The old crone on May Day skimmed the

dew from the grass and she skimmed the well. No rowan twigs hung over the door of the house-wife, so she was able to steal in. She took the "seed of the fire," left a bit of stale butter under the mantelshelf; she muttered a charm over the churn: "Come all to me and none to he!"

Now the husband, who was never allowed to be around when churning was going on (he was considered unlucky, somehow, whatever he might have thought of it himself), came home and saw that things were looking very bad. No butter in sight that day at all. They had to do something at once, so they twisted twigs of the mountain-ash round the cows' necks; put the sock-coulter and plough-irons in the fire; laid twisted twigs of the quicken-gads to the churn which was connected with the plough-irons; shut doors and windows and waited for the witch.

She came soon, howling terribly, for the irons were burning her insides. She cried for a drink, but they would not give it. ("Quite right!" thought the little churner. "I wouldn't have, either.") "Naygurs (niggards) ye are!" cried the witch. But no. "Open the window!" "O musha, but it's sorry we are for you, but we could not open the window for St. Mogue himself." Finally she agreed to bring back the sod from the fire and take away the lump of butter. "The curse of Cromwell on ye!" she cried, as she departed, still hungry.

Aine shouted it out very loud. What a lovely story it was! The churn-dasher went "ker-chunk" and the

butter had come. Oh, she was hungry for it, and, unlike the witch, she could spread it on a thick piece of bread and eat all she wanted.

"What about polishing the stove?" said a little Voice. It was pretty hot, of course, but what fun to do it! She got out the bottle of polish and was pained to discover there was only a little in it. "Mix it with turpentine," said the little Voice. Queer, that would be just the thing—but how did she happen to think of it? The polishing-cloth went off with a bang and lay a flaming thing on the maple and cherry floor.

Again that quick-spoken Voice: "The holy-water bottle. Hurry, hurry! pour it on."

What a blessing that the statues were still about the house for Our Lady's month and the holy-water founts well filled. St. Joseph doused the stove; St. Anne made the duster sodden and black. It took some little time to clean up the mess, but pretty soon you wouldn't know that anything out of the way had happened. She had a little sleep and was waked about six o'clock by Lily, her cousin, who had come from the wake-house to borrow a candlestick. It was growing dusk in the corners of the house, and when Lily suggested going to the cellar for jam, the steps looked rather frightening.

"I'll light a candle and you follow me," said Lily. They sampled various kinds of jam until Lily was suddenly overcome and announced that she had eaten too much and she'd get a licking for not being home before this.

"You look pretty black and sticky," said Aine, regarding her dubiously.

"What about yourself? Come down the lane with me," said Lily. "I'm afraid of the Good People. You can wait for your mother there—she'll be back soon now."

All very well. But after Lily had left her, Aine, too, was afraid of the fairies. She was also afraid of her mother's whip. The little Voice had wriggled out of its hiding-place: it spoke louder and louder. The rifling of the jam-pots didn't matter so very much.

"You have worked while your aunt's wake was on. It is a heinous sin. Wait till you see the penance you get from Father O'Shea! Doing the fourteen Stations of the Cross with everyone looking at you."

Later on she knew even better how bad she'd been.

"Is it you, my ladyship, that made the butter? You'll be taught a thing or two about respect for the dead! And you your great-aunt's heiress, too."

In her turn she bitterly reproached the little Voice that had been so frolicsome and wicked. But all it said was: "Weren't you the clever girl to think o the holy water!"

THE "FREAT" [1]

"Now if Granny was alive and a donkey could be come by! She'd say to pass you under its belly three times," said Mrs. Finnigan in a worried tone one morning. "The next best thing is for you and Larry to go and visit Joseph and Mary Clancy. Don't ask for any food, but they'll give you some, for they know right well what I mean by sending you. Mind you don't thank them for it. If you do, the 'cure' would be lost entoirely."

During that whooping-cough summer, Larry, a boy of nine, who spent his holidays with his guardian, Father O'Shea, fairly haunted the Finnigan farm, for Aine and he matched spasm for spasm, and no one else could be found in like sad case. Sometimes, when the priest drove into the country, and Larry was invited to go with him, he would beg as a favour that Aine be taken along.

"She's awful thin," he said on one of these occasions. "I think Mrs. Finnigan makes her work too hard feeding the chickens and washing the dishes. And no one ever gives her a bit of fun. I don't think she really *likes* going berrying with Auntie McCool. And that's all there is to do except when the Herb-doctor lets us

[1] A "freat" is an unusual ceremony, performed in hope of a "cure."

go with him, and he's getting so old now he won't explore."

The priest, deeply intent on some parochial problem, did not listen closely to what he was saying, and the boy relapsed into his usual thoughtful little self.

But, on the day when the "freat" was discussed as a last desperate remedy, Larry and Aine were more than ever perplexed by the oddities of life. "Do you think there's anything in 'cures'? I mean," said Aine, "if you do get well yourself, does the sickness go to someone else, as they say?"

"If you've done no harm it will fall on a dog or a sheep that belongs to you, so I've been told, but if you have, it will fall on your family. Do you remember Kieran Toppin? He got something in his eye when he was turning somersaults on his way to school, and some old woman gave him a 'cure.' Well, that was all right, but in a little while his cousin was climbing an apple-tree and a branch caught in her eye and she never could see well afterwards. I don't know—there are queer things."

"Did you ever hear of what happened to me last winter? Ma went to see some relations who had been married about a year and they wanted a boy baby, of course, for the first one, and of course I did not know that the wife should not see a girl child just then, and I followed Ma inside. An old woman saw me and rushed out, shouting something, and slapped me. I was awfully frightened, but the baby was a boy, so they did not mind. They let me in to see it and I

stroked it. How was I to know it had had convulsions the day before? It died. And do you know, Ma's cousin still thinks that even before it was born I had laid a spell on it, and then when I touched it—O dear! How I cried for weeks after I found out what she thought!"

"Poor old Aine!" Larry put an arm over her shoulder. "You do have the worst luck."

The interview with Joseph and Mary went off with no difficulty. They had evidently been hosts before to whooping-cough victims, and knew what was expected of them. They did not waste much time in producing bread and cream cakes. They were busy, as it happened, and the slightest interruption was unwelcome, but with innate kindness they did not give this impression. They were glad to oblige in this small way a good neighbour like Mrs. Finnigan.

Aine had a narrow escape: she almost said "Thank you." A fortunate coughing fit literally took the words out of her mouth.

On the way home they stopped to see the blacksmith, for the smithy was always a favourite haunt. An old woman came in and begged the smith to keep for her the parings of hooves of the next horses he shod. "I'm all out of them just now," he said, in a casual way.

"Shure a lady from the city asked me to get them for her. She has a gyarden ye'll never see the like of —all her frinds are that envious—and 'tis because I give her a 'dose' for the flowers now and agin." She

gave the blacksmith a dig with her elbow. "She'll pay me well for me throuble, and it isn't manny gets money for sellin' hoof-parin's, eh?"

Aine and Larry discussed the episode at the priest's door. "What would he say to *that*?"

"He wouldn't mind. There isn't any harm in it. The old women often bring him queer things to make his garden grow, and he only laughs and teases them. He has got wonderful flowers now, hasn't he?"

"Are you going to tell him what you've been doing this morning?"

"Oh, that's different. He'd be vexed, I'm sure. I'm not taking any medicine now, for I'm really over it. The housekeeper thinks I'm finishing my bottle of anti-spasmodic, but I gave the rest of it to old Micky. He said he wanted it, as long as I was getting well, but he'd have to go to confession first, or it wouldn't be safe for him to take it."

"I'm going to be a doctor when I grow up," said Aine. "And I'll use a lot of the old Indian herb remedies."

"A woman a doctor!" Larry scoffed. "Who ever heard of anything so absurd! I'll tell you why that will never happen. You're going to marry me when you grow up."

"Nonsense! You're going to be a priest. They can't marry."

"I haven't *got* to be anything." Larry's tone was darkly significant. "Any boy that can run as fast as I can and knows how to use his fists should be something beside a priest.

"Of course when they're at college the students can have great times. Someone told me that the whole backfield of St. Timothy's football team would be ordained as priests soon—all at one whack. One of the fellows was a famous runner and catcher in baseball. And as for football and hockey he had them all watching him.

"And then when you were a priest you could stand and thunder away like Father John. But I'd never wipe my eyes the way he does when he sees little girls at their first Communion. Why on earth does he do that, Aine?"

"Ma says it's because he has a great love for souls. I'm sorry for you, Larry," she went on. "But you've got to make up your mind that you can't have me for a wife. They'd never let you do it."

"Well, don't you marry anyone else till you get pretty old; you don't know what might happen."

He sat down on a crumbling bit of stone wall. "Go on without me. I'm cross just now, and I want to get over it. Father John calls it going into retreat when he makes me get hold of my temper. I'm cross with you, Aine, can't you see? Go on away."

She laughed at his threatening brow. Then she coughed. And in a moment he was at her side, supporting her trembling little body till the fit passed.

"I'm going to miss you when you are a priest. No one ever cared but you," she whispered huskily. "I think first thing you know I'll be a nun."

"Aine, promise me you'll never be a nun! I'd rather

you married someone else if you're going to feel like that."

"Never mind, Larry, even if I can't marry you we'll always be chums." She picked a leaf of yarrow and thrust it up her nose:

> "Yarroway, yarroway, bear a white blow;
> If my love love me, my nose will bleed now.

Pouf! You don't care! Or else charms are no good. Think of all the dried purple clover I've eaten, and I'm not beautiful 'without and within' and never will be."

"You can't see yourself inside."

"Well, take the outside, then. Am I pretty, Larry?"

"Sometimes."

She had always to be content with that. In spite of many artful attempts on her part, she never could get him to say more.

When she reached home Aine clutched the verandah post of the farmhouse in a dreadful paroxysm. Mrs. Finnigan bore down upon her with fire in her eye.

"What do you mean by doin' that, now? Shure any other child would have been cured long ago with the doses you've had, and here I do my best with you, sendin' you off, and that's all the thanks I'm after gettin'." A sudden thought struck her. "Did you forget, and thank them, maybe?"

"No, I just coughed." Aine attacked the piled-up dishes.

Mrs. Finnigan dropped into a chair by the kitchen-door and looked over the fields towards the Clancy

farm. The hitherto respected Joseph and Mary were under suspicion. There must be something wrong with them. But most likely, as usual, the fault lay in Aine.

There were so many "queer things" in the life of the Settlement, so many bewildering things attended by ill-luck. Aine, growing up in such an atmosphere, scarcely realised how life on the farm appeared in the eyes of an outsider, like Protestant "Beetrus," her cousin from the city who often visited the farm.

But the day when "red hair" became an issue was a decisive one in her life, for then she knew she would sometime forsake her old haunts. It began, as usual, with Joseph Henry. He caught hold of Beetrus's long pigtail. "Say, Ma!" he shouted. "Every year her hair gets redder. What are you goin' to do about it?"

Now it is all very well to have strong prejudices as to red-haired women, disliking them, naturally, for being fundamentally unlucky to meet. Mrs. Finnigan remembered that when she was herself a young girl she would not stay in the house when a red-haired woman appeared, in an extremity, to help in the kitchen at a relative's wake. She was needed, so she was tolerated, but as for her part it was a chair she'd be taking outside, until the house was safe for her to enter it.

But when a relative develops this undesirable characteristic, things have a different aspect.

"I met old Micky to-day," J. H. went on. He looked

hard at Aine and her cousin, who exchanged significant glances at his words. They, too, had met Micky, and to their sorrow.

"Beetrus, you look as if you had been crying," he teased.

Mrs. Finnigan shook him. "Quit that. What is it you are tryin' to say, and what has old Micky got to do with it?"

"Oh, he was drivin' the cows to pasture and he met her"— he broke into a rude guffaw. "He turned the cows back, that's all. An' he said: 'A red-headed female has the divil in her. She's the unluckiest person to meet ever was. If you ever meet her when you're with the cows, turn them back, for your life. If you don't know enough to do this, your mother will have to keep them in the barn every day and she won't get the full of her pail, be sure of that. Niver would I let my cows go near her farm.'"

"Well, he didn't mean Beetrus, of course," said Mrs. Finnigan, defiantly. "Sure she's been here a week and the cows give as good milk as ever they did. Old Micky loves to make trouble, and he was tryin' to get you to pass on the good word, same as you have done. Let me hear no more such nonsense."

That night Aine essayed the unwonted rôle of comforter-extraordinary to Beetrus. "Of course he didn't mean you. But people here are awful about red-headed women. I think myself if you visit us when you grow up, and if your hair seems to shine so with redness, you'd better dye it, or something. You know—

walnut juice, eh? What we used to put on when we played Injuns with J. H."

"I shall never visit such an idiotic place as this, when Ma lets me go where I like. Everybody in the city, and your friend Mr. Bradburn especially, says my hair is the loveliest auburn. They wouldn't call it red for anything. *They* know better. How is it that brat of a J. H. snoops around so, and finds out everything? Nobody but you and me heard what Micky said."

"He might have been listening in a tree. But he and Micky are great friends, of course. They sit in the tansy bed by the side of the road for hours sometimes, and J. H. reads the paper aloud and Micky recites his own awful verses or sings Shan O'Farrel's songs. Micky would tell him, first thing, what he said to us. Probably J. H. put him up to it in the first place."

Beetrus brushed her lovely tawny hair till it flew in an angry cloud about her face.

"I'm so glad I don't believe in unlucky things," she said.

Aine's neatly-braided hair made no conscious answer, but something caused Beetrus to give it long regard.

"You don't believe I'm unlucky, do you, because my hair is a little bit red? You needn't be jealous—yours is a wonderful colour."

Beetrus clambered into the high feather-bed. "My eyes feel heavy from my silly crying."

"Do you know," Aine whispered softly, "I've often wondered what I'd do if I had to live here and was

red-haired. I know it's silly, but I'd get just as bad as the rest. I'm not going to stay here always and I'm glad. I'd love to have reddy-brown hair like yours. In the city, I mean. I get so tired of my pale gold. It's not a bit lucky to have hair that's different from other people's. They look at you so queerly and say: 'Did you ever see hair like that on a child?' I used to be proud when they said that, but now I hate it. I wish I was as dark as dark. Would you like to have dark hair?"

But Beetrus, her red braids neatly plaited in a facsimile of Aine's, had fallen asleep.

"TO-MORROW IS MY WORKING-DAY": MRS. FINNIGAN; AUNTIE McCOOL; MICKY

"Now what would you be thinking a rooster was trying to say when he crowed?" said Jimmy the Herb-doctor, musingly.

If it had been his easy-going, slatternly landlady to whom he spoke, he would have been justified in his absurdity. But Mrs. Finnigan was in no mood for nonsense. And who should blame her? Summoned at a moment's notice to help out her sick relative, she had dragged little Aine out of bed, protesting vigorously, and then had faced a disordered kitchen, a hot day and many unexpected, vexing problems.

"Go on away with you and feed them roosters, if you want to help me, Jimmy Moore! What do you say when *you* crow, for that matter? And I'll take a rolling-pin to you if you ask me any more fool questions on this black day, when I'm fair moithered with all there is to do. Nothing has gone right since I got here."

The hotel kitchen was assuredly rather muddled. It was wash-day into the bargain, and tall, thin Mrs. Connor—she that had had a light foot in her day but the sorrows of the world had weighed her down—was toiling over the wash-tubs in the outhouse. It was hot, everywhere.

Jimmy the Herb-doctor slipped away from all the hubbub, wandering out into the fields and woods where he earned a livelihood and enjoyed himself when the days were fair. He took with him his beloved flute and, like the Pied Piper, "played up" all the children of the village who were free to follow. How he beguiled them, how they flocked after him! It was well worth their while to follow in his steps, even if they had not loved his music. He would set the children to help him find certain herbs of which he had need, according to season—burdock and sarsaparilla, vervain and yarrow—"herb of seven needs and cures" —eyebright, mallow, St. John's wort, ground-ivy, speedwell—they learned to know them all.

He gratefully accepted from the smaller ones moist handfuls of anything that grew.

"Dandelions, now," he would say. "That's the first flower the little Lord Jesus played with. You gather me some and soon I'll be playin' a chune will set your feet dancin'."

To-day was a good day—a day straight from Heaven —for him and his devoted band. For one thing, he had announced that he was going to "boil down" burdock roots, and the stench was always so glorious in the nostrils of the children that they would play truant from school on the day chosen for the event.

Aine, a new follower, had been given several yards of green Irish plaid for a petticoat—a favourite present of "Uncle Jimmy" to his little girl helpers. It was the crippled and deformed little boy whom they called

"Martin the Fairy"—so tiny and odd-looking was he—who taught Aine the right way to pull the herbs —no piece of the root could be left in the ground, it must be plucked whole and unbroken or ill-luck would follow.

Martin shared old Jimmy's joy to-day, for he had found a four-leaved clover: and well he knew that the sight would be welcome to his beloved Piper, as it was a cure for "irrysiplus." Good luck for Martin, for he would receive more lead-pencils and sugar-sticks than usual. Yesterday Johnny the Pedlar had been around with his basket, and Uncle Jimmy had fortified himself for his excursions.

Aine was a great comfort to him. She fairly hung on his words. He would show her the tiny pools in the woods which the Little People of the White Thorn had been using for their trails. "'Tis well known," he would say, "that They come and go by water. They want it, be sure of that. Always keep it in the house, especially over-night."

"Why do they want it?" she asked.

"To wash Their babies in, av course. They'll take milk that has been uncovered if you don't leave water for Them."

He would point out the Fairy Cap or foxglove (the "lusmor" or Great Herb of old Irish tradition). "That's what They were drinkin' out of last night. Wine it would be, belike, made from the red dandelion. Pishrogue!"

She knew what *that* meant; danger to mortals of a

surety, from fairy spells. "But ye can pick the wild leek. Yes, yes, yer Auntie tells ye right in that. They won't go near it. But look ye here, beware now"—and he pointed out an innocent-looking flower, the greater stitchwort. "If I was to let ye pick that, ye'd be pixy-led an' yer Ma would see ye no more."

She began to cry at the thought of these unknown terrors in what had seemed a flowery paradise. So he bent down to whisper: "But if ye were '*away*' an' yer folks came to me about it, I'd fix up a fine charm for ye with the lusmor. *They* would have to let ye go, then. 'Tis the only herb I know is strong enough for that."

"How big are they?" said Aine. It was such a fascinating subject when one had a real authority whose word was never called in question.

He mused a moment. "Not tiny as most folk think. They're like small children, like Sheila there. In the old days when the pioneers first came they wore wooden sandals or half-shoes. Me dear, let me tell you I've had men say to me that's what *They* were wearin' when They were seen in haunted places, with shawls over their heads!

"A quare pack They were. Many's the woman I've had come to me, pepperin' with fright, for a charm for the fear that was on her in her long walks to town, with the butter-tub on her head. The men carried salt, but they and their horses had hard work passing them misty valleys, gettin' a sight, maybe, of a black cat where no cat could iver be."

This morning, as the Herb-doctor sat on the fence and piped to his admiring audience, he was at peace with the world. What if old Granny Hanrahan *had* said he knew too much about the magic of herbs: "And he sittin' there callin' up the snakes of the world!"

"Go on away with you!" he shouted. "Sure you ought to be crushing stone this very minute and you to be giving it to a nursing-mother in a tea-spoon. My herbs have a power in them and you do be knowin' it right well. It's jealous ye are. And you a pioneer who should know better. There's sickness for all of us and plenty seeking cures."

She departed, gesticulating mightily and screaming out something unintelligible. But what did such scandalising matter on a day like this?

It was high noon before he knew it. This was no day at all for boiling burdock roots. He sent away the children, their mouths bulging with bull's-eyes to make up for their disappointment, and on his way home he met some brothers of the spirit—a strolling band of clowns and circus performers, who had played in the village the night before, and who shone with brass, glittered with potential joy in saxophone and cornet.

He forgot Mrs. Finnigan's early-morning ill-humour, and he invited them all with a flourish of his hand to "give us a bit of a chune" in Mrs. Murphy's kitchen.

The dining-room was filled that day to overflowing with hungry people — some unexpected commercial travellers had come in—the waitresses were flurried

with orders; when suddenly a most gorgeous pandemonium of music blew in like a tempest from the kitchen. Then it resolved itself into the jigging melody of *The Old Irishwoman* and afterwards *The Wearing of the Green.*

It was hard to sit still, and they didn't. "Come on, Rosie!" cried one of the travellers. "If the old hotel is going in for cabarets I'm there every time." He grabbed a giggling waitress, and others soon followed his example. Indeed, Mrs. Finnigan herself only stood still for one petrified moment. Then she ran like a wild thing to the kitchen. Even when there she seemed to fall under the spell, and gazed fascinated at Mrs. Connor.

Her lithe body swaying to the music, looking almost as pretty as she did when she was the first sought out at a barn-dance, the latter was stepping it out with a will, her sudsy arms akimbo. The Herb-doctor was "hoeing it down" as her partner, thrilled to his very soul. The astonished maid was clapping her fingers to her ears, "because of the booz." Certainly it was a wonder that the low ceiling was not blown off. No one could hear Mrs. Finnigan's tremendous outcry in that deafening din. She tried ringing the dinner-bell, but it only added zest to the proceedings.

Then she remembered the hose. She aimed it full at the Herb-doctor, in his long-tailed coat, split up the sides, short breeches, and bright green vest. One moment a dancing cicada in a fantastic but delightful world of colour and rhythm, the next, he was a drenched

little figure skipping for dear life down the endless hall, with a black snake of hose after him.

The circus band vanished. Mrs. Connor, flushed and breathless, set a creaking wringer going; ham sizzled again in the pan and the still hungry people went on eating as if there had been no frenzied interval.

In his old shack the dejected Herb-doctor lighted a blaze to warm his shivering shins—he had no great love for water at any time, winter or summer. The sun had gone behind a cloud. After all, it *was* a day for boiling burdock, a day for reeking, horrible fumes poisoning the heavens. His morning blitheness had utterly vanished; his hectic noonday seemed a dream. He realised that he was very hungry.

Slowly he toiled back to the hotel. He really was not equal to the burdock to-day. Mrs. Finnigan and Mrs. Connor were eating dinner amicably.

"If that old fool Jimmy is anywhere around—and not settin' his stinkin' old burdock boilin', let him come for his cold dinner," said Mrs. Finnigan to the air.

"'Tis a day's work is behind me," he said wearily, hanging up his battered hat.

"Ye'll feel more like a man when ye've ate these hot praties," said Mrs. Finnigan, hovering over him with a skillet. "Faix, it's nothing but a half-grown lad ye are."

The cup of hot tea revived him. He glanced at Mrs. Connor and winked. She coughed deprecatingly. She, too, had dreamt, but her spirit had fluttered for a moment only. "Half-grown lad" the Herb-doctor might be. She was a woman working by the day.

To Aine all the unexpected music and excitement had been pure delight, a bit of human drama in which she was "one of the company," until she saw her beloved Herb-doctor chased away, like any bad boy, from the premises. Her howls of rage and protest were unheard in the general tumult; but afterwards Mrs. Finnigan "attended to her" with a vengeance.

So it was a subdued child, with tear-stained face, who re-entered the farmhouse late that night. "Not a word to J. H.," said her mother warningly. "I won't have that lad tryin' to make fun of his ma, an' me after old Jimmy with a hose. Shure an' it was lucky enough that young divil wasn't there. To-morra's a Black Fast and I'll stay in bed and get a good sleep. I do be needin' it bad."

It would not have been wise for Aine to utter the thought that was in her mind: "Why, you always stay in bed when it's a Black Fast."

Sure enough, next day Mrs. Finnigan did not get up. Mumbling her beads and snoring now and then, she passed the day in not too trying a fashion. But unfortunately for Aine, it was also Friday and a Black Fast for Auntie McCool.

Up and down the rooms of the farmhouse she paced, saying her beads, seemingly oblivious of all else. But in reality her tough old heart was twisting within her at the smell of herring and fried potatoes which little Aine was cooking for dinner.

In the old days when, as a pioneer, she toiled in the Ontario fields, fasting, it had not seemed so bad. She

was young then. And here was "that baby of a Janey," who made such a commotion over the least hint of coming fasting. What a feeble generation!

"If she would only help me a little with all this work!" Aine was meanwhile thinking bitterly. Everything had fallen on her small shoulders. What a contrast to the delightful freedom of yesterday! And to-morrow—Auntie would be at her worst, the only redeeming hope being that Mrs. Finnigan would arise a new woman.

When the meal was set on the table Auntie could stand it no longer; she went out and sat down on the door-step and out of reach of the savoury smells; she glared vindictively at the landscape.

Suddenly she was transfixed.

"If that isn't Father John actin' like a madman! He's on fire, I tell ye! Jim, are ye deaf? Father John's coat is blazin'!"

Jim, his mouth full of herring, ran out to find the good Father in distress indeed. He promptly knocked him down and pummelled him. The priest held up an imploring hand.

"That's enough, Jim!" he said, in a weak voice. "How did it happen? My fault, of course. My old clay pipe, as usual. I stuck it into my pocket. And when I was at the store buying my red herring, didn't Mrs. Mooney wrap it well in oiled paper? I'm all right, except for the clothes ruined entirely. Don't let your aunt follow me. I'm very glad she sent you, of course, though I could have beat it out if you hadn't knocked

the breath out of me. Which is worse, to be thumped to death or burnt to a cinder? I'm on my way to the shack to see those two old fellows. Say nothing about this at all, now."

Somewhat ruffled outwardly, inwardly vexed with himself, Father O'Shea arose, brushed off the dust, and walked in the direction of Micky's shack.

Auntie yelled the news to Aine, washing dishes.

"He's headin' for the shack, goin' to see what ould Micky an' the Hard Crust are up to. An' that's due to me, moind ye. I sez to him, Sunday week it was: 'Wan would think, yer Riverince, ye'd pay some rispect to the ondacent condition of that shack. It's a mennyace,' I sez, 'to the whole Settlement,' I sez. 'Thim two ould lads won't let a woman near thim, an' their house an' their clothes are a sight, for I looked in an' saw for mesilf wanst when they were away.'

"Wud ye belave ut, Janey, they lave their butter hangin' by a string over the stove, so the rats won't get ut, and then they forgit ut when they light the fire. 'Tis a spring clanin' that shack does be afther nadin', and let's hope the praste will set thim at ut. He'd best take a needle and thread along, for ould Micky scandalised those visitors from town last Sunday when he came to mass with a nail across his coat. It's a disgrace he is to the place."

Aine had looked out of the window at the beginning of the harangue. But she was only mildly interested in Micky's shortcomings and there was work waiting. Auntie muttered on to herself for a while and then

she prepared to do a charitable deed which had long been on her mind. No one could say that the time was not ripe for it.

Thus it was that, somewhat dismayed himself, Father O'Shea looked out from the door of the shack upon Aid advancing sturdily over the field. Very unwelcome aid it would be, as he well knew, to the already sorely-beset Micky and his old bachelor comrade the Hard Crust. With some difficulty he had set them at washing out blankets and cleaning up the place generally.

"Oh, bless the pore craythurs," sang out Auntie McCool on the threshold. "Have ye anny strength in yer laigs at all, at all? Manny's the toime I've h'isted up me skirts in the ould days and danced up and down with blanket and suds beneath me. Yer duet is a pore thing enough. Four laigs ought to make quicker work. Lave me be," she shouted, brushing past them and their attempts at obstructing her passage. "I'm goin' to help clane this place before the Orthorities come. I'll *con*sthable ye to the consthable if ye so much as lay a finger on me."

A rattling of pans sounded from the inner room, a clatter of crockery, and a ballooning envelope of dust swept the dejected culprits kneading for dear life in the tub. Father O'Shea, knowing himself worsted, had left the scene. "The two of you ought to be able to manage one woman," he chuckled as he left. He had had a bad time with the Hard Crust, that obstinate old fellow, who, on his first entrance, sat stolidly upon

the unlighted stove and refused to consider any house-cleaning whatever.

"Phwat relation, Father, wud ye say Jimmy Foran's half-sister is to me aunt?" That was his one and only remark, and as it had no clear connection with the subject it had annoyed the good Father excessively, just as the Hard Crust had hoped. "After all," the priest thought, "a taste of Auntie McCool would be a good thing for the pair of them. They're hopelessly lazy and dirty."

"Phwat for wud a man loike thot have the roight to come ordherin' ye around in yer own house?" said Micky in a deeply puzzled tone, squeezing out a blanket gingerly enough and flinging it on a fence to dry.

"A *man*, is ut? It's thot woman in there that's botherin' me," said the Hard Crust, vindictively. "We've but the wan dish-cloth and I'll have to burn it to-night afther she's gone."

"Gone, and Hennessey comin'!" Auntie retreated.

"O yer the Irish wan," Micky yelled.

"And if Oi'm Irish, for the Lard's sake what do ye call yersilf? Ye've as much Irish as I have. It's a woman's hand ye nade in thot shack, but pity the pore sowl who'd thry to do for the loike of yez!" she shouted back. "I'll look for some food in the place—I'm near dead for a bite—whin ye've visited pore Bridget Finnigan again. I'll tell her ye're comin' fasht on me heels."

It was nearly five o'clock when the two old men, who had sunned themselves for many hours after the arduous labours of the blanket-washing, felt that they

could enter the shack and see the havoc that had been wrought.

In silence they lit the fire and stumped about on the wet floor hunting for one thing and another, hopelessly misplaced, hopelessly clean. They promptly burnt the offending dish-cloth, still redolent of soap. They then put the pot on, though there was nothing to make the water tasty except potatoes.

"Look out the dure, will ye! Wan of the Finnigan hens, by Gennis [1]! Av all the luck!" shouted old Micky suddenly. A strayed hen was surely enough clucking throatily on the threshold.

Micky's hand was upon it in an instant: in another its neck was wrung, and—well, there was no time for plucking at the end of a—perfect day, so into the pot it went, feathers and all.

Hennessey was seen walking hurriedly to the tryst. "I'm a bit late," he called.

Micky coughed gently. "Chest in toime, chest in toime, Shamus," he wheezed. "We've claned house for a change and it's a bit upsettin', ye moind. But there's a hen in the pot for supper."

When Mrs. Finnigan killed a cock on St. Martin's Eve she was careful to make a cross on her arm with the blood—and mindful not to wash it off. But that was between herself and the fairies.

Jim was to kill the rooster to-night. She felt like saying: "If ye get splashed that's luck for ye, me

[1] Begonies.

lad," but remembering how he always smiled at her superstitions handed down from "the rale Irish," she contented herself with remarking: "Don't be afther forgettin' the pail of ashes in the cellar to catch the blood, and watch the chickens when they go to roost that the one you've picked on don't perch too high."

Joseph Henry looked up from his homework. "Say, Ma, nobody nowadays cares where they kill their chickens, on St. Martin's Eve, or any other time. It sounds darned silly to me to say you must let the blood drip into the ashes. Why, the Grogans, they kill a lamb and divide it up with their relations, and they don't bother about no chicken, even, unless they want one. What's the idea about St. Martin and the spilling of blood, anyway?"

Mrs. Finnigan gave him a sound box on the ear. "Will ye hould yer whisht, ye young reprobate! It's not for the likes of ye to tache yer grandmother to suck eggs. And St. Martin the grand saint, too. He's always had a fowl kilt for him. Don't ye mind me tellin' ye that yer old granny said that in Ireland there was men goin' in procession out huntin' St. Martin's Day and killin' martins—how they sang:

> The martin, the martin, the king of all birds,
> For in that night he was caught in the furze.
> Although he is little his family is great.
> I pray you, landlady, now give us a trate.
> Sing holly, sing ivy, sing ivy, sing holly.
> A drop just to drink it would drive melancholy."

"Why, that's the song we sing on St. Martin's Day before dinner," said little Aine.

Joseph Henry's ear was smarting, but he was noted as an "argifier" and could not long be downed. Anyway he was his mother's spoiled darling, and he could nearly always say what he thought with no untoward consequences.

"St. Martin before he was a saint was awful tight-fisted, then. It was a good lesson he got once about giving food to beggars at his door. All the same there's no call to be leavin' out a good plateful of fowl for the stranger or beggar that never comes—and then to burn it. Here am I hungry for a taste and never get a big enough servin'. My mouth fair waters when I see that plate left out."

"Oh, but you are awful greedy," said Aine. And the usual hostilities commenced.

Next day at dinner the old grace of St. Martin had just been sung when the door opened and Auntie McCool stumped in. Joseph Henry's face grew very red. He knew now that St. Martin was amply avenged. Wasn't Auntie McCool seen safely off the premises a month before—11th October, to be exact? How could she be back, a "hang-over" from the good old summertime?

She explained, or rather, announced that she had just come for a week; her son and his wife, with whom she made her home in an American city, had been called away unexpectedly by the death of a relative, and she thought she'd "jist step back loike to see how things were goin' at the Finnigans'."

Mrs. Finnigan—"Bridget Jim," as everyone in the

Settlement called her, after the custom of giving the husband's Christian name as a suffix to that of the wife—was always hospitable and cheerful, in spite of long days of toil and the upbringing of three children; and she motioned Auntie to a seat at the table with a welcoming smile. "Sure ye must say a prayer to thank St. Martin for choosin' his day for a good meal."

"Hand me that plate there. I know 'tis set for a stranger or a beggar and ye'd niver be miscallin' me loike thot. But it goes to me heart to see waste, and there's nary a stranger in these parts."

She took St. Martin's share, but did not enjoy it long. Fumbling in her green worsted bag for some trifle for "Janey," her elbow knocked a choice morsel from her plate and it fell to the floor.

The Finnigan family was aghast. They all knew what *that* meant. An evil spirit in the food. And of course she would not touch it.

"Give me another forkful, will ye, Bridget Jim? Sure it might be Shrove Tuesday Eve and the Night of the Big Much, 'tis so hungry I am this blessed minnit. It's thin ye would be pressin' the food on me an' sayin' as yer granny did in the ould days, 'Eat all ye can stuff or ye'll go hungry through the year.' Me son's wife don't hould by thot, so all the year I've been fair famished loike. The Night of the Big Much is the night for me. D'ye moind they say 'tis the longest day of the year —longer by the len'th of a rooster's crossin' his two feet goin' across the yard?"

Her good-humour could not be dampened by any

little misadventure—ordinarily enough to send her flying from the table in a rage. Poor Joseph Henry's heart sank—not only was he to lose what he could scarcely expect to gain—St. Martin's share—but Auntie McCool's plate must be heaped with the best.

"Ye managed well to kape yer foine cock of the ould breed. Didn't a thafe thry to stale it on ye and lave a pore bird in its place?"

Auntie, her hands folded across her stomach, at ease with the world, began to be curious again over the Settlement doings.

Young Jim answered readily: "Oh, there was enough match-scratchin' going on outside every hen-house, you may be sure, and I heard plenty of squawking chickens in a bag, and quick feet running. It's not boasting I am, but if it had not been for me and my work last year watching the hen-house, Auntie there wouldn't have had a cock to her dinner."

Aine listened round-eyed. "But why do they want to exchange chickens that night?"

Mrs. Finnigan pushed her chair back and began to clear the table. "Larry O'Toole was the lad I had me eye on this year. His grandmother wanted bad to get our cock when the blood was drippin', for a *cure*. Aine, for a *cure*! And then, too, the old lady thinks maybe she'd leave a disease behind that our hens would get, that there wouldn't be one scratchin' in the yard next year."

Auntie nodded sagely. "Larry's granny! A Turk could be no worse. A rale witch she is and no mistake

—an ould lizard if ever there was one! I moind a song she made up long ago about exchangin' chickens on St. Martin's Eve:

> Of all the days that ever dawned
> Since Adam was an infant.

I used to make sure of me rooster by takin' it nine miles away before St. Martin's Day."

"Well, I kept mine in the pantry all yesterday afternoon," said Mrs. Finnigan, with a satisfied sigh.

"That's the old song of the Widdy Flaherty's beautiful white drake, that she kept behind the door till it got out and was stolen on her." Mrs. Finnigan hummed it over:

> "Bad wind to the robber, be he drunk or sober,
> That murthered Nell Flaherty's beautiful drake,
> He was fit for a queen of the highest degree,
> He was plump, fat and heavy and brisk as a bee.
> Of all the games since Adam was an infant
> It was the dirtiest ever played on man,
> And may the Divil run away with the dirty old savage!
> To grase his white cabbage he murthered
> Nell Flaherty's beautiful drake."

In the highest spirits Auntie set out to "pick praties"—she never bothered about the tedium of dish-washing when visiting, but certain little deeds of grace she would do when she felt like it. On her way out she saw the waiting churn. "I'll make the churn for ye, if ye loike," she said.

Joseph Henry vanished. That was one chore he had got rid of, anyway. For a time the old woman worked

with a will, but one of her rages swept over her when the butter did not come quickly.

"Fetch me the holy water, Janey." Aine brought the bottle obediently, but it was thrust aside. "No, if the butter won't come without, lave it be. It's mesilf will be goin' out to pick praties. There's a foine outdoor job for ye on a nice day and ye can have a *thoo-chay-tha-chay* with a neighbour passin' without somewan kapin' her eye on a pore widdy, an' her arm near broke with the shakin' it got at the churn, bad cess to ut!"

The kitchen door opened by a crack of a few inches and the face of old Micky was seen peering anxiously in. He had heard the uplifted voice of Auntie McCool and feared the worst. Far enough away he had thought her; but it was too late to withdraw. In his hand he carried a rusty pail; she would know what he was after.

"Good day to ye, McGee. Come in here and see the job that's waitin' for an able-bodied man loike yersilf. Here's Mrs. Finnigan thot gives ye buttermilk each churnin' as if ye were a calf. Put him beside the churn and let him finish ut. Wait till I git a proper pail for the loikes of yez. Here's a milk-pail, now. Ye can slug down the buttermilk in thot when ye've done the churnin'. A man-size drink for a man-size job!"

His head hanging, and utter dejection evident in every line of his figure, old Micky was impelled by the magnetism of Auntie's presence to the waiting churn. He limped as he walked across the floor.

"Come in here, Jim," Auntie sang out. "Here's ould

Micky a cripple this day. Have ye been knockin' him down lately with yer divil of a cyar?"

Jim gave the old fellow the tobacco he was expecting and asked what had happened. "'Tis the sliver of a kick me cow gave me the marnin'. Have ye anny turpentine handy?"

"That ould grouch that shares yer shack with ye—'a Hard Crust' he calls himself, and faith it's true enough—can rub yer back for ye," said Auntie. "I've got some tammyrack biled down with hawthorn twigs that wud be a good tonic, but I left it behind me. Wait a minute now, I've thought of a foine cure for ye."

She hurried out to the poultry-yard and, in less time than it takes to tell it, had chopped a chicken in half and was grimly determined to slap part of the dismembered carcass on old Micky's injury.

"Be off with yersilf now!" cried Micky, frantically shuffling away from her. "No woman's hand is going to touch me. Ow, Mrs. Finnigan, ma'am, sure and I'll make yer churn for ye, for a dhrop of buttermilk I'll be gettin' and maybe some sugar and tay and a loaf of bread; but how was I to be knowin' that Mrs. McCool there was back on ye? Send her and iverywan else out of the kitchen and I'll give a hand with the churn, even if it's lame I am and the pains runnin' through me till I'm trimblin' all over. But do ye get the ould woman away. I can't stand her ballyraggin' me."

"Don't be afther tellin' yer throubles, ye and yer pains! Ye are an ould Prey around the house with yer

buttermilk-pail. A regular calf. 'Tis a good dose of salts groanin' inside ye is what ye'll be afther nadin'. Now I'm off to pick praties, while the other women I'll be seein' out there will be loafin' and gossipin' because it's St. Martin's Day, and they won't turn a hand. 'Tis the sun has cures in it for iverywan, and the dew on me skirt marnin' and evenin' has niver hurt me yit. . . . Wisha, the pore ould man, if he could only talk, eh? It's dumb he is, and the churn waitin' for him."

She went out for a journey of inspection of the place, taking care to see that Micky did not escape her when the churning was done. He was making ready to leave when she re-entered the kitchen.

"Shure and ye're not goin' without choppin' up half a cord of wood. 'Tis small enough return for all the buttermilk ye're swillin'. As I say, 'tis a regular Prey ye are around the place. Come in here, now, till I give ye a loaf of bread and a pat of the butter ye made."

She stuffed his pockets with tea and sugar, and with his hard-earned food he made for the gate. On the way home to the Hard Crust he met Joseph Henry, downcast because he had sent a ball through the stained-glass window of the church and broken a pane sacred to a pioneer. They sympathised deeply with each other.

"Phwat for now wouldn't the old pioneers be dead and done with an' forgotten, and no painted windows built for them at all, at all? There's ould lady McCool. Do ye think she'll iver rest aisy in her grave? Ye

can't down her; ye can't lave her in wan fixed place, ye can't lose her. How long are ye in for her this toime?"

Joseph Henry admitted that his one hope lay in getting her angry.

"She's rale uplifted," said Micky sadly, "and when she's breathin' the sunny air these foine days, pickin' up praties, ye can't roile her. Ye'll chest have to be waitin' for a rainy day. That takes the starch out of her, and it's the only thing on the Lard's earth that will."

"Well, I wish St. Martin could have met her once," said Joseph Henry bitterly. "Perhaps people wouldn't think he'd be so much of a saint then."

"Maybe St. Martin would have felt like us," agreed Micky. "Ye moind St. Brigid cursed him up and down for not showin' her the consideration that was comin' to her, as she thought. And she said: 'Little man, my name will be remimbered when yours is clane forgot. The salt say will cover your house.' And thim very words came true, they say. Ye can see his house in the waves sometimes, but crash! if ye touch it, it's gone. In some ways yer Auntie there is like St. Brigid, I'm thinkin'. A word out of the way and whisht! there's cursin' ye and stirrin' up throuble."

"That doesn't sound like a saint," Joseph Henry objected.

"But it's a woman for ye!" said Micky triumphantly.

"An' there was another saint I do be remimberin'," he went on. "St. Latereen, now, of Cully, it would be. Listen to what I'm tellin' ye of high tempers and

vanity. Shure a good burn on her bare fut she got and well she desarved ut. I'm not denyin', mind ye, that she fashted like a saint. She had but wan male a day. But I'm doubtin' she was a bit lazy or a poor housekeeper, maybe she was savin', or maybe she liked the walk, but annyways she had to go ivery marnin' to get the seed av the fire from the smithy, because she let her fire go out ivery night.

"An' she'd put the burnin' coal in the skirt of her long white gown an' no harrm done. Wan day the smith was lookin' a bit harrd at her bare feet and he said, 'Ah, St. Latereen, what a darlint, purty white fut ye have'—manin' no dishrespect.

"Vanity it was that made her look down, an' she scorched her dress with the coal, it fallin' on her fut, an' she give a yell cud be heard as far as the Fermoy Loine an' back.

"There she is, all through her own fault, I'm tellin' ye, an' what does she do but get vexed at the wrong pairson, an' she says, 'Niver more will there be a smith or his forge in Cully.' 'Tis bad-timpered they are when the fit's on them; saint or woman, 'tis all wan."

THE CANDLE

"WHY do you call Auntie Bridget 'Ma'? She ain't your real ma. You never had one. Whenever anyone calls you my cousin I get so mad——"

Lily, a pale-faced child with nun-like countenance, which utterly belied her actions, but which was of the greatest service to her in obtaining a reputation for good behaviour, was as usual "plaguin'" Aine to do something. It was only to sit still and let Lily brush her hair, her skilful fingers twisting it in shining strands, piling it up, plaiting it in coils or in a pigtail. But it was hot, and Aine was tired after the day's labours. She hated Lily's caressing hands on her hair. "I wish you would go on home; maybe if you brushed your own hair instead of mine it would look better; it certainly is an awful mop just now."

From a tiny child Lily had had the passion for manipulating hair that was possessed by other people; her own mouse-brown braid did not interest her in the least; but Aine's hair had a special fascination for her—she made pomades from plantain seeds and scented them with geranium leaf and "applied as directed," when Aine would allow her to do this. "Are you glad you're my cousin?" Aine's stern inquiry on

these occasions always brought the quick response, "You're the nicest cousin I've got." For this extorted recognition of her status Aine would have endured much plantain.

But she had such very brief moments of leisure, and even compliments palled after a time. Lily never had anything interesting to say, and she was not a good listener.

Lily "tagged around" when Larry came over to the farm to see the new calf, but her only reason for doing this was that it seemed to annoy Aine more than anything else. Then, when Aine and Larry had been talking "secrets," while Larry covered Lily's ears and mouth effectively with one hand, J. H., scenting trouble, might come to rescue her; it was always fun when he came, for the onlooker.

Still more sultry the evening grew; thunderclouds warned Lily that departure was wise. She shrieked out the old taunt: "You aren't my real cousin, anyway—mean old thing—couldn't let me play with your hair for five minutes!"

Aine sat on the doorstep and brooded over the fact that it was all true. She wasn't "real cousin" to anyone. There was no loneliness compared to that. Lily had once confided to her that she knew she herself was not what she seemed. "I bet I'm someone else. My mother and my father and I don't look one least little bit like one another. They may have adopted me after I had been stolen away from a *lovely* home by gypsies; stolen from my real, real mother." And Aine had smiled

at her strangely, for the thoughts that raced through her mind set her apart from childhood.

It was bedtime in a moment, though one might not sleep. When the small bedroom was almost unbearable the Lombardy poplar-trees close by the farmhouse whispered together over its roof the promise of the coming storm; their tossing leaves lashed the message from branch to branch in an ecstasy of apprehension; the trunks swayed and creaked ominously.

Auntie McCool rose from the four-poster bed which she shared with "Janey" and, guided by flashes of lightning, stumbled to the bureau.

"'Tis lightin' me candle I'll be. Why wouldn't Jim be takin' an axe to thim trees? It was mesilf saw thim planted, but if they should fall on our necks in a storm the Lard save us!"

Aine, tossing restlessly on her feather-bed, felt that perhaps the tree nearest the house should indeed have been cut down; she could spare that one; but then she remembered how the Jersey cow sought out its shade in summer heat and looked so contented beneath it. It would be a shame to touch it.

She coughed as the acrid smell of Auntie's huge and ancient candle assailed her nostrils. She knew that Auntie would have made the sign of the cross as she lighted it, to drive away the evil spirits. The candle was still magnificent in girth indeed, but the years had reduced it to little more than a hand's-length.

Every year when Mrs. McCool visited the Finnigan household, the candle and the stump of a broom which

she had used in her old farmhouse came as her "things." What a queer old candle it was, with its rag-wick, Aine thought, as she listlessly watched her aunt at her devotions. How often she had been told by its guardian of the great virtue residing in it. Brought from Ireland years and years ago—made from tallow by the peasants and moulded roughly, blessed by the priest, lighted for Christmas and great celebrations —a treasure of treasures. And yet to the Finnigan boys it was a thing of derision—even Mrs. Finnigan was loath to see its clumsy stubbiness persisting in a world where it was a curious survival of primitive piety and rude handicraft. On Candlemas Day Mrs. Finnigan thought nothing of spending twenty-five dollars on the beautiful white tapers which little Aine loved to see aglow. What had they in common with that squatty, ancient and sputtering light with its horrible smell? Well, the more it burned the sooner its horrors could be forgotten.

Auntie gave a great puff and the candle flared moodily out. "There's niver another clap will be on us this night. Me candle saw to thot. Now I'll be savin' ut till ut's needed. Faith, and I'm thinkin' I'll be givin' ut to yer ma when I go home to-morra. She will loike ut because ut belonged to the poineers and their toime."

Aine, not dreaming for a moment that Auntie was in earnest, and revived by the refreshing coolness, felt suddenly mischievous. She had heard Auntie's stories of the pioneers and their wonders till she was tired.

One subject she knew of old to be dangerous, even in daylight, but she was delightedly reckless. "Was it true what they say, that you and your husband were the handsomest couple that were ever married in the old church?"

In daylight, if that subject were broached, Auntie hemmed loudly in an ominous way and hitched her rocker on to the verandah where she resembled a bull lowering its horns in readiness for combat, as the rocking-chair snapped back and forth. She had been teased over the saying for many years. Aine had taken some chances, it must be admitted. In a flash she had been rolled out of bed on to the floor; a smother of bedclothes descended on her, and over her stood Auntie with a lifted razor-strop. To be sure, it only struck the floor in its flail-like blows, but there was a menace about it that made Aine tingle in anticipation.

"It's you will be spendin' the night in that corner; let you be sayin' wan word more and you'll be afther gettin' a larrupin' with this."

The next day Auntie McCool fulfilled her threat. She thrust the sad-looking stump of a candle into Mrs. Finnigan's dismayed hands and charged her to keep it safe. "There's a power of blessin' in ut. Burn ut if you must now and agin—there's nothin' better in a storm—but lave some of ut till I'm here again." She bestowed dolls' clothes, made after the most approved pioneer pattern, as a parting gift to Aine, to show her there was no hard feeling, and departed.

The candle began to disappear rapidly the same day. "I'll just tell her the rats ate it, if she ever asks for it again," said Mrs. Finnigan to Joseph Henry and Aine as they watched it melting reproachfully in the sun, as it lay on the ground in the farmyard. It took its own time. It seemed to Aine—who had heard her mother's words with some misgivings—that it would never utterly vanish in its pathetic blobs of grease. Even in dissolution it had a character all its own. "Bury me and be done with it!" the stiff rag said day after day. But Aine refused to have anything to do with the last vestiges.

Mrs. Finnigan forgot all about it in the multitude of her farm and household tasks. But Joseph Henry did not forget. He marked the spot gleefully, and it was his proud privilege, at the first carefully chosen moment, to escort Auntie to the weather-beaten rag when she came the next summer.

"An' yer ma tould me to me face the rats had eaten it! The Lard forgive her! There's a curse on this house. Oh, me candle that came from Ould Ireland, that I treasured there manny years! 'Tis in a wicked world it was needed to burn."

Auntie waylaid the priest of the neighbouring parish, whom she had known as a boy and whom she still regarded in that light, and laid bare the sin of the Finnigans.

"Your candle should have been left in my keeping," he said.

"It's bad ye'd be wantin' ut with more holy things

in yer keepin' than ye know what to do with. The loike of thot candle couldn't be seen in all Canady, let me tell ye, and ye sayin' ut should go with yer holy things. It's ashamed of ye I am this day. Go back to yer prayers and yer preachin'. Ye haven't the roights of ut at all, at all. It's mesilf will be lavin' the Finnigans this very night. 'Tis no house for me without me candle."

But a cyclonic storm blew up, shortly after this conversation, which justified Auntie McCool in the sight of the world. The poplar-tree, so long scanned with anxiety, just shaved the verandah as it fell, crashing with a roar like Judgment Day; one of the outbuildings was blown down also. Above the growling of the retreating thunder could be heard the voice of Auntie, as a prophet rejoicing over the destruction of his foes. It did not add to her popularity, but little recked she of that. "'Tis the only way ye can larn the wicked. Give it to them good!" she shouted to the skies. "'Tis the curse of me candle upon ye, and worse nor thot is to come!"

"I never wanted your old candle," wept Mrs. Finnigan. "Smelling rank it was and fit only for the rats that ate it."

"Joseph Henry! Come here," cried Auntie McCool, and her voice rose in a gasp of triumph. "Tell yer ma how you showed me where the rats ate me candle."

She sat through the subsequent proceedings with a keen relish for all the dramatic values of the occasion.

"Eh, it was worth me candle to get satisfaction for wanst out of thim Finnigans," she said to one of her

neighbours—who would not have dared, in Auntie's presence, to say one word derogatory of the former.

"Joseph Henry's skin is smartin' yet and long ut will be before his ma can bear the sound of the word 'rats.'"

FISH-DAY

AUNTIE McCOOL struck a spade smartly into the green turf of Mrs. Finnigan's back lawn and took out two neatly cut squares. Mrs. Finnigan, coming out to feed the hens, uttered a loud cry of dismayed protest. "And when did I tell you there was turf for your digging? Here I've lost all me plants—ye left me shamrock last year hidden in the old willow-tree, never even took it to the cimitery, but you hid it on me all right. Now I won't have me turfs taken up and carted away."

"Shure, it's not so much as a leaf can be taken from yer farm without there's tongue-thrashin' and hulla-baloo. What's two little sads, and they meant for me own family's graves! Ye'd grudge it, would ye? Now, who's goin' to take them to the cimitery for me? Not yer lads, av coorse; they're too busy to give their ould aunt a lift in anny of their contraptions——"

Mrs. Finnigan interrupted hurriedly. She was willing to swallow the insult to her lawn if she could escape with the loss of two sods only. "There's the mail-man at the gate. He's new here, but he has a kind heart in him. He's a Catholic into the bargain, I'm told."

Auntie McCool wasted no time in waylaying him. "Shure I'll take yer turfs and yersilf too. Hand them up here."

"Them Finnigans," she began breathlessly as she sat beside him, "though they are me own flesh and blood, in a roundabout way ye moind, are the close-fisted wans if ye loike. They're Catholics, loike yersilf, av coorse, yet they might be haythen or dirty black Prods living on the Nazareth Loine, for, would ye belave ut, they grudge me these bits of turf for me family in the cimitery!"

The mail-man clicked to the horse reflectively. He was new in the district and had therefore never encountered Auntie McCool before on her annual visitations. Sweeter than a toothsome morsel on his tongue was a bit of gossip. Skilfully he plied her with questions and, truth to tell, he was somewhat aghast at the result. The whole Settlement lay disgraced before him—shameless, ungenerous, untidy—the housewives of the neighbourhood were taken out, shaken and dusted before him—not much was left but rags.

Nearing Murphy's general store, Mrs. McCool requested to be set down. "Come ye in here," she commanded, with a beckoning finger. "The ould fella is out of the place to-day; his young son is in charge There's things I'm needin'. And ye'd best buy a fish for yer Friday's dinner. He kapes foine fish, I'll say thot for him, none better. He's not got much else that's worth buyin', so give him the good worrd for ut and take his fish."

Now the mail-man, being a tolerable Protestant, if he was anything, had no need of fish for his Friday dinner. He had not the slightest intention of buying

one when he threw the reins over the horse's head and followed Mrs. McCool inside the store. He was of a curious disposition; it was an adventure, in its way.

The old woman went with surprising swiftness behind the counter, brushing young Johnny aside as if he did not exist; she cut off several yards of print, took two or three cans of tomato soup and corn, a few cakes of soap, and was ready again for her interrupted journey. Johnny stood by with mouth agape; it was highway robbery, of course, but he was helpless. It had happened before and would happen again; some surprised and delighted family in the village would be presented with a can of tomato soup for their supper and some print for their children's aprons, and the fame of Auntie McCool's generosity would be spread far and wide.

But the mail-man had now bought his fish. How or why he did it he does not know to this day, but he remembers paying for it and seeing it lying, a slippery and scaly monster, at his feet in the cart.

Arriving somewhat dazed at the cemetery, he was told by Auntie McCool to get out and fetch along the "sads." Old Ma'am Peg, who lived in a tiny house among the graves—having given the property to the church long before for a graveyard, on the understanding that she herself should not be moved—considered herself sole guardian of the graves and objected strongly to Auntie McCool's entrance.

But the issue had been settled when Auntie was born.

"I'll thank ye to remimber I come wanst a year to

look after me family, me bein' wan of the poineers, and with just as much roight in the place to plant things as yersilf. Where's me young maple saplings I planted last year? Have ye tuk thim up? Bad cess to ye! It's mesilf will be bringin' fresh wans and settin' them out to-morra."

"While I'm the gardeen here there's no saplings will be messing up the graves of the McCool family or anny others," said Ma'am Peg firmly. "Ye bunch up thim graves with poor ould lady Finnigan's best shamrock-pots and her foine flowers witherin' and dyin', and now ye come with two sads. Glory be to God, it's mesilf will be pitchin' them out when ye're carted off by that grinnin' ijit there. Wheriver did ye pick him up?"

The mail-man retired to a convenient grave and let them have it out. After a time, as their anger abated, he saw the two ancient dames going in amicably together for a "swat o' tay" in the kitchen. He was thirsty, tired and hot, and yet he had not been included in the invitation. His wrath rose as he saw the fish that he had been forced to buy. He took it up gingerly and, dodging behind trees, reached the McCool grave on which the "sads" rested triumphantly in a welter of tin cans filled with flowers and dying shamrocks. He laid the fish down on the turfs and stealthily again made a bee-line for his horse. Letters were late that day, but only two old women knew why.

Auntie McCool went home as the shadows fell, on very good terms with the world. But alas! next day she tempted fate and went back with the maple saplings.

Ma'am Peg was really magnificent as she pointed to the unaccountable fish on the grave, now sadly in need of burial and accounting for. Auntie McCool was absolutely silenced—her own family's grave—the McCool grave—had been desecrated.

"'Twas the mail-man," at last she groaned. "The Divil mend him! I made him buy the fish at Murphy's, and not a bite would he eat to spite me. Oh, the black Prod he was, and I afther takin' him for a dacint God-fearin' Catholic." She sat down and wept.

Ma'am Peg took the saplings and bent them into a kind of litter on which she placed the remains of the fish; then she threw both in the road.

"I wish I could get rid of ye as aisy," she said grimly. "Can I niver larn ye it's me own cimitery and it's mesilf who'll say what's to go on the graves! There's a can of the soup ye left yisterday. Come in with me and we'll see how it tastes. Murphy's fish hasn't left me with the appetite I had, but ye've a long walk before ye and ye need some stren'th for it. Come in now and have a swat o' tay."

BLINDMAN'S HOLIDAY IN THE HOLY SHANTY

"WHAT does 'Hen Fruit' mean, Auntie?" said Aine. She held under her arm a tattered copy of a farmer's weekly.

Mrs. McCool gave one of her rare eldritch laughs. "Faix, ye moind me of the day I lost me shoe in the swale; a foine nest ut made for the hen that found ut, the next year ut was. Heel an' toe, ut was filled with *fruit*! Now arre ye afther guessin' what I mane?"

The two were walking toward the old log shanty over which Auntie's heart yearned unutterably. Half-ruined, tumbledown though it was, this relic of pioneer days held so much fascination for Aine and so many memories for her aunt that they often went there for a sort of silent communion.

"When ye git rale ould," said Auntie, "yer frinds die on ye ivery day; the young folks don't care for yer ramblin's on about ould days an' ye near die yersilf for somewan to share things with. 'Tis thot makes manny a wedded pair a comfort to each other in the end, though a cat-and-dog life they may have led in their early years puttin' up with wan another. A child —yes—but all the women don't have childher, or they grow up an' git married thimsilves. Thot's why

you and I hit ut off betther than most—ye loike to hear ould Auntie tell ould tales."

The child nodded sagely. She knew what it was to be lonely. "Let's go home now and come to the shanty early this evening and make a fire in the old fire-place." Needless to say Mrs. Finnigan was away, spending the night at the bedside of a sick neighbour

"Ye've a good head on ye. Ivery year whin I come back I wonder will the place be gone. There's been great toimes in thot cabin—the great honour it had, as ye well know, Janey, it bein' chosen each year for Father O'Shea's hearin' of confessions, and the mass said the next marnin'. I wish now I had a sup of the rale thick clobber in the pail: we'd think nothin' of atin' thro' a pailful: 'twas set on a chair and all hands had a drink. And me raisin bread! Wasn't I the famous wan to set a loaf before a hungry man! I can see now ould man O'Brien makin' for the shanty to give the worrd that Father O'Shea was comin', an' him wid the glint in his eye and his tongue fair hangin' out for a taste of me raisin bread. O wisha, wisha! Ye've tasted it, Janey, wid the hot molasses, in yer ma's kitchen, in the big kittle set over the fire-place.

"Well, O'Brien, the ould gossip, would answer me hail: 'I'm not stayin' this toime. Father O'Shea will be hearin' confessions to-night. I'm afther givin' the word. If ye see Flynn comin' from the weaver's, give him the word, will ye?'—They're all gone, Janey, all gone but ould Auntie."

Aine seemed always to have known about the sanctity of the ancient shanty. It needed no stretch of imagination to see the herbs hanging from the rafters, the holy-water bottle suspended by a string tied around its neck, and the rosary on the wall.

How those first immigrants had whispered and shaken their heads, as they sat on the chairs made out of the horns of cattle; they could not but admire the pots and pans so well scoured, and with the final touch of a fancy "dint" given with a knowing finger, tracing a pattern and making them utterly different from the common run of kitchen utensils.

That evening after an early tea Aine walked happily beside Auntie, as they took the familiar trail to the shanty. The child clasped her rag doll. "There's betther for ye than thot, alanna! Some day 'tis a live doll ye'll be houldin' in yer arrms."

Everything made Auntie reminiscent. The evergreen boughs with which she used to dye the grey blanket which was her annual offering to the good Father—wool from a prize grey sheep went into it.

"Manny's the toime he's thanked me from his heart for me blanket, an' praised me raisin bread after the task of confessions, which left him that faint! I moind as if it was yistiddy the last toime. I says to him: 'They say the *York shillin's*[1] are out, money won't be so tight, and thot villun Mrs. Moriarty is savin' up for a yoke of oxen.' And all the toime I was thinkin' in the pride of me heart, Janey, that had to have its

[1] A variety of old Ontario currency, 12½ cents.

fall: ' 'Tis me that will have the stoile an' luck an' a yoke of black oxen for you, Father, next toime ye come.' An' there didn't I see go past me Mrs. Moriarty, an' all the neighbours comin' over their fields to see her an' her fine yoke of oxen, an' a feather in her hat that was niver seen since or before she left Ireland, propped up straight in the wagon. And Patsy O'Brien cryin' out afther her, the way it made me heart lift to hear him: 'Look at thot, now! 'Tis the way some great lord died in Ireland and left the Moriartys a foine *boodle*, when she can go the roads wid a foine black feather in her caubeen——' "

"What was a caubeen, Auntie?" interjected her companion breathlessly. There were so many things that needed explanation, but Auntie never liked to stop by the way.

"Och, an ould Irish hat or bonnet the loike of which ye'll niver see to-day. An' her shoutin' out: 'Be off wid ye, O'Brien. 'Tis the loikes of yez would be puttin' the *'fraid* on me wid yer evil talk an' yer tongue as sharp as a blade.'

"An' I calls out to the ould lady: ' 'Tis prayin' yez ought to be this minnut instid of waggin' yer feather an' showin' off yer oxen. Soon enough ye'll be lyin' in the cimitery.' — Dead an' gone they all arre, Janey, an' me the only wan left, tellin' ould tales, ould tales."

They reached the cabin at length, sunken on one side, settling in to earth fast. From the chinks once stopped by mortar what eyes were peering!

"We'll light a fire, Janey." The musty smell of the old place! The chill that was upon it!

A besom of twigs lurched crazily in one corner. Auntie's knotted hand smoothed the treasure lovingly. "Manny's the day since me an' me ould man went to the swale and gathered the twigs for this—the day I lost me shoe . . . a hen's nest—did I tell ye, Janey? —always put out a bit of lamb's wool in a hen-house if you want hens to lay, moind thot.

"The more I look at thot broom the more I do be wantin' to use ut, but what wid the bareness the dust hadn't half a chance to settle on the furnichoor."

Suddenly, overcome with memories, she threw her apron over her head and began to wail softly to herself. Aine went outside and gathered some brush and brought in a log. The candles they had brought were set, unlighted, in the window-ledge. With practised hand the child set the flame creeping among the branches of dry cedar. Brown, and stained with time, the fire-place came once again into its own.

Aine struggled with the big log silently, her frail body all one panting, vehement desire. "Shure no log, faix, is too heavy for me. Let me at it!" Auntie woke to life, in order to rebuke the lack of the pioneer spirit. "When the clay pipes got started after a loggin' bee an' the women in their plaid shawls settin' about the fire, an' what wid the smoky 'ould witch' in the tallow candle you couldn't have told the colour av thim—smoky enough, shawl an' room an' women—— Och!" A puff of smoke, acrid, made her cough.

"Smoky they are this day!" she mumbled. "Brimstone for thim!"

They found an old box on which to sit, huddled before a fiercely burning blaze that roared up the chimney, for a wind had risen and was making the pine-trees groan and shake in protesting voices of futile anger.

And Auntie saw, and told, of Father O'Shea in his vigorous manhood, gowned in his faded black cassock, coming to the log shanty as to a temple. Gaelic and English prayers and speech rose in a babel from the men and women assembled to make their confessions —quarrelling, violent, short-lived.

"When ould Mrs. Flynn arrived she prayed so loud, that night I'm afther tellin' ye about, that all eyes were on her—whin her ould man nudged her, she prayed the louder, so loud that it plagued Patsy O'Brien and he tried hard to quiet her down. 'Shure there's others wishful for a worrd wid the saints,' he sez. But divil a bit did she listen. 'Go aisy,' says the good Father, about this toime. 'Me good woman, go aisy, will ye! I'll hear yours next, niver fear.'

"Right over there he was whin he dressed her down. This ould cabin has been a holy place, let me tell ye—— There's no nade to laugh at what I do be sayin'."

"But didn't you laugh at her praying so loud? It seems awfully funny to me—and queer that it all happened here—and so long ago. It makes me feel shivery."

"Maybe I was bitter enough and said more than I

should next marnin' whin I giv thim a tongue-thrashin' for their quarrellin' in me holy shanty." Auntie's eyes, red with smoke, were fixed on a fantastic cavern in the fire. "Next marnin' ould man Moriarty stopped to tell what he'd heard I'd said. He tried to pick a quarrel wid me. Mrs. Flynn was his cousin, ye moind.

"'Bad manners to ye an' Patsy O'Brien—ye thrash the neighbours out, wheriver ye go!'

"'Tis true enough what ye say of Moriarty,' I sez, 'his tongue nades a good scrapin'. We're none the betther for him an' his flyin' visits that seem loike a year.'"

She looked down at Aine, huddled at her feet on the bare earth, asleep. Mumbling to herself, she sat brooding over the fire, her head covered by her worn plaid shawl. Soon she fell into a dream. She thought old Patsy roused her by shaking her shoulder, but it was a falling log. The embers flew in every direction, but she did not think of them. She must get back to the farmhouse—soon they would be missed.

They stumbled home over the long trail somehow. Behind them in the log cabin the wind entered, softly at first, then roughly. It beckoned to the fire: "Come and play with me!" And the embers glowed at its breath.

"A tramp it was," Auntie always maintained, "that ruint me holy shanty, bad cess to him! Or it might have been Micky: I wouldn't put it past him—he has no love for holy things, nor niver had."

But little Aine longed so to tell Beetrus of that last

night in the cabin—and knew herself doomed to the bottomless pit by that baleful glare in Auntie's eye: "If you dare so much as open your lips!"

Anyway, Beetrus would not have understood. She would only have said: "Why, that was a crazy old place, anyway. Good thing it was burned!"

SPRINGTIME AND WITCHES

AINE, during her twelfth year, was once more allowed to spend a term at a convent in Toronto, this time as a day pupil, boarding with Mrs. Prentiss. The scepticism of Beetrus had never once shaken her own faith in superstitions, strange rites and portents. But at the convent, now that she had become articulate and comprehending, she received impressions that were at first very disconcerting. Unblinkingly, to all outward appearance, she heard that she must pay no attention to "such nonsense." What, then, about Father O'Shea? Inwardly, her childhood world was tossed about and overturned.

It was a relief in many ways to know that all she had dreaded meant nothing and less than nothing; the girls laughed at her as from the country, ignorant and credulous. No longer was she afraid of the dark. But Sister Mary Benedict, tall and stately, frowned upon fairy lore also, except in poetry. Must all those delightful stories and legends be swept away? A chill wind seemed to envelop her, and a flame in her spirit was blown out.

After school, all was prosaic and full of drudgery. She was told that she must "help out" and she did. Sometimes, as it grew toward spring, it seemed as if

the burden of the boarding-house was upon her small shoulders alone, and that Mrs. Prentiss was "helping out." It was a very exclusive establishment; all the boarders accepted fully understanding that they were highly favoured mortals; Mrs. Prentiss was not often visible, but one felt her directing hand. Aine and the little maid toiled that Beatrice, lily of the field, might secure every advantage in education and entertainment.

After dish-washing was over, one evening Aine was standing in the porch wistfully watching the world and his wife go a-pleasuring. Other of the boarders drifted in and out, but Van Bradburn, the "cub" reporter on the *News*, hunched himself against the balustrade and smiled at her now and then.

At last, breaking a long silence, he inquired cheerily: "Ready for our walk?"

"Why, I didn't know we were going!" she said, dimpling down at him.

"Didn't know you were engaged to me for the evening? Just shows how much that child cares for a promise!" he said aggrievedly, addressing a departing roomer's overcoat, with a great show of just displeasure. "Get on your hat and come at once."

They had walked two or three blocks in leisurely fashion, going ever towards the sunset, when Aine asked suddenly: "Do you care for poetry, Mr. Bradburn?" She did not wait for his answer but hurried on: "That sky makes me think of something we had to-day in school: 'Young spring evenings reddening down the west.'"

Mr. Bradburn looked a trifle blank. "I'm afraid I'm not long on poets," he confessed. "Now, you know I'm awfully fond of flowers and music, and both of those are poetry, if you like. But what is the good of stringing words together in a rhyme when you see a sky like that and get a sniff of this blessed air?"

"Oh, I know!" Aine explained a little confusedly. "But knowing poetry seems to make you feel it all the more, somehow. Perhaps when you were a boy they didn't teach you much at school?"

"Is that where you read poetry?" he asked, with one of his nicest, most engaging smiles.

"Oh, sometimes Sister Mary Benedict gives us pretty things to learn, that she runs across. We had an awfully nice one to-day. You'd like it, because it's all about flowers. Shall I say it to you?"

"Fire away!" said Mr. Bradburn. "The first thing you know you'll be turning an honest but rather stupid amateur gardener into a high-brow, but I dare say my friends would welcome it for a change. I'm sure I bore them horribly sometimes about my bulbs in my window."

"'Fairy folk a-listening,'" she began—and stopped to take a sidelong glance at her friend.

"All right, I'm listening, too."

"Fairy folk a-listening
Hear the seed sprout in the spring,
And for music to their dance
Hear the hedgerows wake from trance.
Sap that trembles into buds,
Sending little rhythmic floods

Of fairy sound in fairy ears.
Thus all beauty that appears
Has birth as sound to fairy sense
And lighter-clad intelligence."

"That sure is pretty," he said, with ungrudging approval.

"Well, but do you *believe* it, Mr. Bradburn? Sometimes I think the Little People we used to talk about have really shown themselves to you, and then the next minute I'm sure you are only saying things and getting me to say them so that you can laugh."

"Ainy-Janey Amelia Rosanna Finnigan, or whatever your name is, you cut me to the heart! Your suspicions! Have I ever laughed at you before anybody? You know I haven't. Don't I believe in fairies and witches? You know I do. The only thing I grudge you is knowing the old Herb-doctor—the walks you must have had with him. O Lordy!"

"Well, of course there were bewitchings in old days," said Aine, musing. "It's only when I go to the Library that I can get hold of books about those times. The ballads are like grown-up fairy-tales, aren't they?"

"Do witches come into the stories?" said Mr. Bradburn in some amazement.

"Why, of course." Aine's opinion of the latter's literary attainments sank to zero. (Even so does the real book-lover invite a stranger into his house and judge him by the books he takes from the shelves to browse upon.) "Would you like me to tell you about Alison Gross?"

"If she was a witch "

"Well, she lived in a tower, of course, and she was the ugliest witch in the north country. She tried to make someone love her, and of course he hated her, she was so ugly. She told him she would give him a mantle of red scarlet, fringed in golden flowers. Then when he said all he wanted was for her to get out of his sight, and stay out, she brought him a sark—that's a kind of a shirt—made of the very softest, crimply kind of silk, with pearls about the band. Then she offered him a golden cup set with jewels, and this is how he answered her:

'Awa', awa', ye ugly witch,
Haud far awa' and lat me be!
For I wadna ance kiss your ugly mouth
For a' the gifts that you could gie.'"

"That sure was giving it to her in the neck," said Mr. Bradburn. "He needn't have made it quite so strong, seems to me. But of course no real lady would go on asking for kisses after that hand-out."

"Oh, wouldn't they just!" said Aine, delightedly dancing around him. Her companion watched with great pleasure her gyrations, even though, on a city street, they became two rather noticeable people.

"That's all you know about it. But as it happened, this witch was really insulted this time and she blew on a grass-green horn and swore by the moon and stars that she would make him sorry. Then she took out her silver wand——"

"Where had she tucked it before?" demanded her companion. "In her top-boots?"

"I don't know," said Aine shortly. "I wish you'd stop talking. She turned her right and round about, the way witches always do, you know."

"I didn't know," the irrepressible one said, but under his breath.

"And said sic words that made the man fall senseless to the ground."

"Sick?" said he, startled out of good behaviour.

"Well, it spells it s-i-c in the ballad. What does it mean, then?"

"Search me. But I guess they made the man sick, all right."

"I should think so. She turned him into an ugly worm which had to toddle round a tree all the time."

"Toddle? Worms can't walk, can they?"

"They can in ballads. Alison Gross used to come and see him every Saturday night with a silver basin and a silver comb in her hand. She would take the worm on her knee. Ugh! how could she do it? But the man said he would rather toddle round the tree all his life than kiss her ugly mouth. Finally, Hallowe'en came. That's the one time in the year, you know, when witches are helpless. Then the Seely Court was riding by—you needn't ask me what that was, for I don't know and I wouldn't tell you if I did, after the way you have been behaving. This is a Scotch story and I know it isn't as much fun as the Irish ones: you always listen to them without interrupting. But anyway the Fairy Queen lighted down on a bank of gowans——"

("Bet anything they were flowers!")

"Not far from where the poor worm used to lie."

"I thought you said it was always toddling? I do wish you would stick to facts."

"The queen took up that horrid worm in her milk-white hand and stroked her knee with it three times, and then he was his old self again."

"There are lots of people in the world who are worms, but no Fairy Queen ever comes along, I've noticed. You never were a worm, my dear, but all the same you had a pretty drab life of it when you were a little girl, didn't you?"

"O you old tease! No, I think I had lots of something in my life that other people don't have. I should have missed it dreadfully if I hadn't had all those queer things to wonder about."

"Never mind, infant. There's plenty to wonder about still. For instance, where are we, anyway? Ending up at the same place as usual. Why isn't there some new place that we could get to now and then with a queer shiver down our backs?"

"Oh, I get queer shivers enough," Aine said with sudden sombreness. "Mrs. Prentiss snoops round so —when I'm reading——"

"Well, I have to lope down to the office. 'The Yella Highway Man' waits for me, too. I liked your witchy-wormy story. Is my left eyebrow any higher? But next time tell me an Irish one."

"St. Latereen of Cully?"

"St. Latereen was always my favourite saint. Was she a man or a woman?"

Aine shut the door in his face. Then, remorseful, kissed her hand in good-bye through a very tiny crack. She knew that it was wide enough for him to see. She knew that he would be looking back.

A GIFT OF THE TONGUE

THE noise of successive doors slamming shook the grey old farmhouse. "It's aisy seen the Divil is in the place," said Mrs. McCool from her pulpit rocking-chair in the centre of the sitting-room floor.

Patsy Fee's freckled face, usually so happy, was black with scowls when he reopened the doors he had just slammed—as a relief to overwrought feelings—and brought in an armful of wood for the stove, for it was still chilly weather though the sun was high. Mrs. McCool liked to be comfortable when she came visiting.

"It's aisy seen the Divil is not out of the house yet." Her caustic tongue could not resist this thrust; it was not often she had Patsy, her sworn foe, at her mercy.

Aine, reading on the sofa, home for the holidays, sympathised very much with the hired man on the Finnigan farm. Here it was spring again, and a month or more before she might reasonably have been expected to descend upon the place Auntie had come for her annual visitation.

Some hours before the door-slamming episode Aine had been gathering the first dandelions on the roadside when Patsy drove up from the station past her own gate. Auntie's bags were on the seat. Aine could

scarcely believe her eyes. Was she really going somewhere else this summer? Patsy looked down at her as the horses slowed up; he enjoyed the joke silently for a moment, then burst into a loud guffaw.

"No, Ainey, me dear, Auntie McCool is down the road a bit headed for yer maw's place as usual, but I tould her I'd take the bags on. They'll go to Mrs. Flaherty's verandah until your folks have to send me for them. Ow, won't it be a sight when I dump them bags before old lady Flaherty and say: 'I've a visitor for ye, comin' just behind me'! Won't she just dance up and down, fair wild with rage! 'Just you plank them bags back where they come from,' she'll say. 'If you think you're goin' to dump Auntie McCool on me, you've got the wrong number intoirely!"

But the outrage to Auntie's feelings was only disclosed in its entirety when Aine went down the road to meet the old lady, who had refused to drive with Patsy after a long conversation with him.

"The lies that lad tould me! He lies as aisy as one would ravel wool, the Lard forgive him! Says he: 'The Finnigans have gone away, d'ye moind.'

"'Gone away and niver tould me?' I says. 'They sold the place in a hurry,' he says, 'an' they have gone to the States, bag and baggage,' he says. 'I'd best be afther takin' ye to Mrs. Flaherty.'

"'Niver wud I set foot in thot place, and well you know ut.' But off he druv with me bags. O wisha, wisha! Wait till I git me tongue on thot bould lad! 'Tis a bastin' he'll be gettin'; he'll be wishin' himsilf

in brimstone first. Janey! I wish your ma would call at the pest-house and tell thim to sind for thot Patsy."

The "bould lad" had to do full penance, be sure of that, before the scene of the slamming of doors. Mrs. Finnigan would tolerate no joke on her visitors by her hired man, even if they were unwelcome ones. Besides, it had been a whole year since Auntie had come to stay for the berrying season, after immemorial custom. The year before, "J. H." had taken too many liberties with Mrs. McCool's feelings, and she had departed in July, with many curses. Of course, if she *would* tell her dreams in public, you could hardly blame a smart youth for standing at the window and saying:

"Isn't that old Micky coming up the road? Have you had any more dreams about him lately? Didn't you say he was standing by a light, and that, in a dream, is a sure sign of marriage? And you told him about it. But I s'pose you didn't say what you said to us that morning: 'God forbid that I should ever wed with such a figure of a man!' They say he was the wildest man when he heard of your dreams. I don't remember who told me that he said: 'Sure, I'll niver marry till people would be saying, "Here's a wonder in the world—a woman in it," and as for ould Auntie McCool, she led her ould man an awful life, barging at him all the time, and I'd sooner be sittin' beside the stump of a tree than to be listenin' to her all day.' But all the same, Micky's well known to be a catch, if you can get him."

Then Joseph Henry wisely jumped out of the window

—an upraised razor-strop caught his fingers but missed his shoulders by an inch.

In truth Auntie did have much to endure that June. She took it out on Patsy when she could not catch the elusive Joseph Henry, and Patsy almost threw up his job the way she kept an eye on him, never suffering him to have a moment's rest from some chore or other.

And now she was back again, having chosen to overlook all slights and start afresh. She had not made a very good beginning. It looked to her as if she and Patsy would be fighting out old grudges all summer. But her spirit was ready for the fray and she enjoyed the slamming of the doors immensely. It was a good sign.

Rising up betimes next morning Auntie looked about her to see what good work awaited her idle hands. She would go later to the old farm and plague the new tenant to desperation with questions, but just now she had energy in her sturdy old body that demanded an outlet.

Patsy played quoits almost every summer evening on a bit of velvet-green turf—he always kept it neatly shaven. As Mrs. McCool looked at the spot she saw her way clear. It would be a charity and no mistake to bank the house and keep Patsy from wasting his employer's time. She routed out a shovel, and with hands that had not lost their cunning in her old age she spaded that turf for all she was worth. Of course she did not know that under the earth of the embankment which she thatched Mrs. Finnigan's most

cherished seeds were sleeping. But even if she had, it would have made no difference to her present frame of mind.

Patsy looked in at the kitchen door as Mrs. Finnigan was cooking breakfast. "Mrs. Finnigan, ma'am," he said, in an expressionless voice that was yet very significant, "it's mesilf that will be lavin' this day month. Will ye plaze look outside beyant here."

Mrs. McCool was finishing a very good breakfast which she had made ready some time before, her appetite being keen after her labours. "Fate cannot harm me—I have dined to-day" might have been her motto. She waited calmly while Mrs. Finnigan went outside and looked at her work.

Mrs. Finnigan was herself somewhat of an artist in plain speaking and she told Auntie McCool exactly what she thought of her at some length. Finally the old lady rose with dignity.

"'Tis mesilf will be goin' where good work is thought of as it should be, and 'tis manny the house will be hearin' to-day of what ould lady Finnigan has said to her visitor's face. 'Twas a hearty welcome I thought I would be gettin'—and her own hired man tratin' me loike dirt. I niver tould ye of the insult put on me in this house last night. Janey there and thot limb J. H. pulled me dure open as I lay in bed at nine o'clock with me frilled night-cap on me head and me best nightie on me, and I heard thim say: 'Push the dure wider and have a peek, Patsy—she's a sight in thot cap.' And they gave him a push and he fell in the

dure. Well, I'll say this for him. 'Twas not his fault but the bunch of divils ye have for yer own—badly-brought-up children as I iver seen. The heart-scald they'll give ye, niver fear!

"I chased thim the len'th of the field by the light of the moon and they hid on me in the lilock-bushes. They were too smart for their poor ould Auntie. Was it mesilf that tould ye a word of their misbehavin'? 'Ye ould thralish!' I sez to Patsy, but I niver held ut agin him."

Mrs. Finnigan had got over her first outburst of wrath. After all, Auntie had not been without her trials. And she did not quite relish the prospect of her notable tongue wagging about old lady Finnigan. "As good as a thrashing-machine" was a saying that came to her mind as very applicable.

"There, now, sit ye down, Auntie. 'Tis mesilf was going to have Patsy bank up that place with turf, in a terrace like, for it's a new fashion in towns as you will be knowing—and you've saved him a heavy job. He'll thank ye for it. As for his bit of plot for quoits he can easy find another place, and we'll hide the brown earth with them hen-coops ye made, and there's still time to sow some more seeds."

Mrs. McCool had a knowing glint in her eye, but she subsided into a chair at the table and managed to consume another fried egg which was pressed upon her. (In her own expressive language, "she was full to the bill.") Bridget Jim was the clever woman, no doubt about that. She could use soft soap with the

best when it suited her. But as long as she knew Mrs. McCool knew, matters might rest.

Patsy put his head in at the door. "When is the ould girl goin'?" he asked in a loud whisper.

"After berry-picking is over," Mrs. Finnigan replied firmly.

A groan, and he had vanished, beaten. Mrs. McCool smiled grimly. Once again a gift of the tongue had saved her feet from dusty roads.

"I'll be washin' me aperns," she announced, with alacrity in her tone. "Yer fire's near out. Tell Patsy there to bring me in some chips"

THE DOUBTFUL BLESSING

BLESSINGS did not appeal greatly to Aine as a child. The day when she went, with the rest of the faithful, to have her throat blessed, was marked in her calendar 14th February.[1] She did not think of it as St. Valentine's Day. It meant a queer sinking of the heart as the priest thrust the flaming candles cross-wise beneath her chin. They were guarded by paper shields, but still, she always shut her eyes and gasped. Rather a thousand times all sore throats that might occur during the year than undergo such an ordeal. She always wondered how old Micky fared. He attended all church ceremonies. Sometime, she *knew*, his grizzled beard would catch fire. Surely he, too, was frightened?

And then the Saturday before Easter had its terrors for her. She might escape them some years if Mrs. Finnigan went to "the blessing of the water," in the church, in her stead. But most likely she would be given an empty whisky bottle and told to fill it from the tub in the church vestry.

[1] Festival of St. Blaize, kept elsewhere on 2nd February.

"What do we not owe to the water-candle? Dimly it lighted our mother's unending tasks . . . from what ills has it not shielded the dwelling! When the angry sky flings its javelins from tumultuous cloud you may see a tiny flame spring up in every house —the flame of a candle blessed on Candlemas Day—to ward off the lightning."—*Chez Nous* (Adjutant Rivard).

Now every old woman in those parts carried as her equipment for the day a similar bottle; but it could be hidden beneath capacious shawls or the folds of a full skirt.

"Do you wrap it about you dacint with brown paper," said Mrs. Finnigan, amused at Aine's tear-stained face and reluctance to do her obvious duty. She did not know that on this particular Saturday two ills had been added to Aine's burden of the empty bottle. One was that Protestant Beetrus would insist on going in the rôle of critical observer and sceptic, and the other worriment was that her Roman Catholic cousin Lily had a new holy-water bottle, one made for the purpose, a bought one, with a carved glass top. How could she, Aine, produce a whisky bottle in the face of Pride and Ridicule? But inexorably she was pushed forth from the shielding doors of home. By her loitering she had made herself late.

"I'm afraid we'll miss it if we don't hurry," she said to Beetrus. But in her heart she was glad that this year she was not to be among the jostling crowd of old women—each one anxious to be first at dipping out a bottleful from the tub which had just been blessed at the altar and carried into the vestry by the altar boys.

"To you from me!" they would cry sharply, pushing her back as she tried shrinkingly to approach the tub. "'Tis not for the loikes of childher to be crowdin' out their grannies."

Well, to-day, thank goodness!

But to-day too many had been ahead of her. With a

very red face, she scooped up what was left, but her hated bottle remained only half-full. Beetrus asked so many questions. What did she want it for, anyway? To sprinkle on the floor in storms? What a funny idea. What good would it do? Beetrus said *she* was never afraid in storms. "Why don't you fill it from the tap?" she asked.

The insidious temptation assailed Aine—vanquished her. No one would ever know. Shamefacedly, she turned the tap.

Well, anyway, it was half-holy—almost the same thing. But miserable, guilty tears filled her eyes as she went hurriedly out of the vestry. She'd have to confess what she had done to the good Father. And *how* she hated to do it.

Old Micky met her at the door. He seemed greatly distressed.

"O wisha, wisha! Such a misfortune. Here was I goin' home with me bottle, wrapped in brown paper same as yours, alanna—and hard enough it was for me to get it with all those strong-armed hussies elbowin' me about—a lone man has no chanst at all, let me tell ye—and on me way home, with no warnin' at all, mind ye, the bottle chest slipped out of me hand and bruk to smithereens. The praste won't belave me when I tell him. He'll say, 'A bottle, is it? H'm!'"

"You can have mine, Micky," said Aine quickly. "There is no more water left. It's a little bit mixed, but I guess you won't mind."

"Mixed? Not with whisky?" said Micky.

(Was a shade of eagerness in his voice? Perish the thought! That subtle inflection was horror.)

"No. Just mixed." And Aine edged quietly away.

"Well, I'll take it and thank ye kindly, me dear. Ye've saved me loife."

His life? . . . "I don't know that it will be very good for storms," quavered Aine.

"Haven't ye faith?" said Micky sternly.

"Well, anyway, if a storm comes we'll have to borrow from you."

Beetrus was giggling irrepressibly. At any moment she might give the whole thing away.

"Oh, burn yer candles," said Micky, and trudged off home.

Aine felt better. Yes, there were the candles, of course. She had to face her mother's wrath for being so late getting to the vestry, but Mrs. Finnigan was mollified by the thought that it had been a kindly deed to old Micky.

"You might have given him half the bottle?"

"Why, he had nothing to hold it in."

That night Aine was awakened from a sound sleep by the terrors of the heavens. She might have slept through it all if Auntie McCool—who had come early that year to the Finnigan farm—had not shaken her violently. "Where is it?"—"What?"—"Why, the holy-water bottle, av coorse." She had not been told of the calamity.

Beetrus, awakened, began to laugh. "Why, the

child's hysterical!" said Mrs. Finnigan, rushing in with a flaming candle. "Ye provokin' child, Aine Finnigan, get up this minute and say your prayers—forgettin' the holy water in the very time 'twas needed. There's nowhere to borry it in the dead of night."

Auntie McCool crossed herself as a terrible clap shook the house. "O Lard, we're done for! A candle in each room won't help out—if only we had the holy water. Lads, lads!" she shouted above the din. "Wake up. Ye'll be struck dead in your beds else."

But Jim and Joseph Henry slept soundly, only stirring uneasily when a flaming candle was set in their room.

Beetrus *was* afraid—just as much afraid as Aine. She wept and wailed and wished she was home, and hid behind the door where the blinding flashes were not quite so frightening.

Aine remembered old Micky in her prayers. She was not afraid for herself. He had no candles. . . The night was very long.

In the morning she dressed quickly and sped over the sodden fields to old Micky's shack. A great pine-tree near his home lay in wreckage on the ground—but the worst had not happened.

"Micky!" she cried. After a long time he came out, drowsily rubbing his eyes.

"Was ye callin'? . . . Lard save us! Look at me tree!"

"Were you frightened last night by the storm?"

"Faix, an' me sleepin' all through it."

"And you didn't use the holy water?"

"Niver a drop."

"Oh, I'm so glad," said Aine happily. "I see it's all right the way it is."

"What! With me foine tree gone?"

"Oh, it might have been worse." Aine's tone was gaily careless. "Plant another. But the water's *all right*, you know."

Micky's mouth gaped. "Ye've gone daft," he cried, as she danced away. Then a dark thought held him transfixed. "The giggling little Proddy! What diviltry has she put that young 'un up to? Is it a charm she had in that bottle to blast me tree?"

He took the bottle of holy water and poured it over the splintered tree, every drop. Then, much relieved, he went in to breakfast. The Hard Crust was a dabster at cooking bacon.

THE FAIRIES' BARGAIN WAISTCOAT

BEETRUS was making candy, and in her endeavours to get the kitchen fire to burn she discovered something under the back lids of the stove that aroused the curiosity that was her chief characteristic. Anything unexplainable was always a fascination to her. She was interested in local gossip in a mild way, but it was the story full of astonishing implications which she saved up in her mind to discuss with Aine. The latter always had the most unexpected solutions for problems—could always tell her—if she would—what the "queer things" meant. To Beetrus, scornful of beliefs, they were idle tales. But she wanted solid ground for the fantastic superstructure, the astonishing things her Catholic relatives were forever doing and saying.

For instance, here were half a dozen clay pipes, calcined or stained, lying in deep ashes. Why?

Aine was angry. "Oh, do leave things alone! We want that candy on our walk and it's late now. Don't go fussing around and poking at things. I never saw such a meddler. Look at the trouble you made the last time you were here by rummaging in the attic among the wake end-candles in that box. Things you should never have *touched*. Even Joseph Henry knows better than to go near *them*!

"And the day you found the old bag of dyes and smeared the stuff all over your clean dress. Now those are *wake-pipes*. You do seem so stupid about some things, you'd think your mother would tell you what you ought to know. They're the pipes the old people smoke at wakes and they must never be taken from the house, unless they are wanted for another wake. And a stove is a very good place to keep them in, *I* think. Wouldn't Ma have a fit if she saw you handling them!"

Beetrus almost let them fall. "O dear!" she sighed. "Everything in this old farmhouse seems to whisper of death.

"Well, can I clean out the ashes, then? I'm sure it would help the fire to burn."

"No, don't touch a thing," Aine said shortly. Of what use to tell Beetrus that the ashes were of a "special" quality, collected after the kindling of the New Fire in November?

Beetrus had come down to spend a week at the farm, during Mrs. Finnigan's unavoidable absence. Auntie McCool thought she was dying. Never did anyone choose more unfortunate time to be sick, in Mrs. Finnigan's opinion. She went away for a week with dire forebodings as to the state her house would be in on her return. As she expected the worst, Aine and Beetrus saw to it that she was not disappointed. They took things very easily. Aine was always the leader in decisions as to how they would spend the large amount of time that they found on their hands.

Old Maury was the chief attraction to both. In the first place the walk there was likely to be adventurous because Joseph Henry and his tribe of Indians might descend at any moment upon two innocent females, dashing down the wooded height, making the lonely road echo their fearful yells. . . . And then she was a queer old dame herself.

Joseph Henry looked upon Auntie's illness (she being providentially stricken down elsewhere) as a real windfall. He had not had a holiday for years, and as he was a great organiser he lost not a moment in summoning his followers. He had learnt how to make excellent pancakes, and the art stood him in good stead. A pound of butter went like magic, it was true, but what of that? His gang always had one square meal, at any rate, in the Finnigan kitchen, deserted at their approach by femininity. Fried eggs formed another staple.

Loafing along the road the two girls meantime enjoyed their hardly-won leisure to the full. In the pockets of their pinafores lunches were bulging. To-day, quite unmolested on their journey, they reached the haven of Maury's kitchen, and were soon listening to an enthralling tale. Maury told them things they had never dreamed existed. All one had to do was to sit still and listen. Aine might say a word now and then —never the outsider, Beetrus. She had been told this long ago.

They started off to-day with the fairies' mansions, filigree tents, "with little holes to let them come in

and out, and sometimes on the roof there would be the marks of the fairy horn. But I never heard the buglin'." Then they went on to the "nanny-berries" [1] of Ontario gardens, looking when ripe like large black currants, and tasting like prunes.

"Lunanshies, is it? Thim would be the garden fairies. When I was a child, after the elevinth of November we could eat no berries on the bush They had passed over. And when I grew up and went out on May Day with the rest of the old folk to gather flowers for the statues of Our Lady and we couldn't find none, we cursed the Lunanshies——"

"Cursed them?" Aine simply couldn't help interrupting that time.

"Sure we did. On that day we could do it. And They not being wishful to have strife about it always made up to the poineers by lavin' heaps of wild flowers in the corners of the fields, linin' the snake finces. (Folks nowadays should think shame to thimsilves to tear down them purty old finces and be buildin' thim contraptions that tear your skirts to tatters.)

"You would know the roses They had left by the beautiful smell av thim, not of the roses at all, at all, far finer. I can't be afther tellin' you what it was like.

"We would never let anyone move those bushes, though they wanted to bad enough. But if a young girl asked for a shoot she got it, for we knew why she wanted it. She never thanked us for it, av coorse, for if she had, then the charm would have gone If it came

[1] A species of viburnum.

up, she would be married that year; if it blossomed, she would have children."

And then Aine asked Maury what "bargain cloth" was like.

"Ma showed me a piece in an old quilt, and she seemed to think the world of it. And she says Auntie McCool had a piece of it, dyed black and framed on her wall, with her other 'figarys' from coffins."

"Me cookies are burnin' this minnut. Wait you now."

Aine murmured to Beetrus: "I must show you that quilt. It has the funniest things in it. One is a bit of a man's wedding-shirt. You see, long ago, there weren't many really good shirts in the Settlement and so when a man got married he borrowed the one wedding-shirt, and then, to keep a little souvenir of it, he clipped a bit out. Ma says that after a while the shirt looked like a piece of dough after a biscuit-cutter had gone over it. And then when a girl in Ireland got married and came over here, all her friends gave her a snip of some dress of theirs to remember them by, and embroidered their names and the date. And sometimes, Ma says, the man she would not marry gave her, very sadly, a piece of his necktie to put in the quilt. Or there would be an old mutch with the ribbons, perhaps, like Granny's."

"I know the sort of thing you mean," whispered Beetrus:

"When I am dead and in my grave
And all my bones are rotten,
This little piece will tell my name
When I am quite forgotten."

"O *no*! Ma's quilt is—well, remind me to show it to you."

Maury brought hot cookies for them to munch, but when she was ready to sit down over her tea the unanswered question about bargain cloth drifted across her mind's vision.

"Faix, and I knew one ould sowl who had worn a bargain petticoat till it was fair riddled with holes. Lucky would you be if you found a piece of it these days. You must know that a bargain waistcoat was first heard of in Tralee in Ireland long and long ago. There was an old, old lady who left her wool out in the cow-house just to see what They would do with it. She didn't believe in Thim at all, they say, but she gave Thim good measure when she was at it, enough for a waistcoat.

"'Pishrogue!' she said. 'Charm and spell, is it? Let us be seein' what ye will be doin' with all this wool.' Well, in the mornin', lo and behold ye, the waistcoat was there. It finished her right enough. She died from the shock. That's how the thing began.

"I mind a pet lamb of mine, the last lamb dropped. We made the wool for Thim from that wan year. Old man Flannery always carried a pill-bottle of holy water under his hat to throw in the stream while the others washed the lamb till it was spotless. Then it was put in a fenced-in corner of a field that had been reaped and it was combed and kept nice until its skin was that silky and soft, for two days. Then they 'killed the Cailleagh,' as they called it. A man who

was good at throwin' the sickle would soon put an end to it; the blood was caught when it was warrm and it was sealed and put away. They'd hang up the body for a day and a night; then they would clip the wool and it would be stored away for the pepper-and-salt bargain cloth. Once a year we'd take out the great spinning-wheel for the grand occasion it was. I'd make iveryone kape away. It was brought in to the driving-shed before sunset. The song goes something like this:

As the ould lady spins ivery inch of the thread
The man with the bargain jacket falls dead.

"Wanst I knew the worrds of what the 'Sivin Women' sang when they came to a certain housewife who called for thim, and harrd enough it was for her to rid hersilf of thim afterward.

Ho, fir-ee, fare-ee, fa!
Ho, well done! Grand!
Ho, bravo, the web of homespun!

"I was afraid enough," Maury confessed. "I never wanted to spin. I knew an old crone called 'Three-fingered Jenny' and if I iver met her on the road carryin' her little butter-tub I would shrink back with me heart beatin' like mad at the sight of her clumped-up hand. They said she had been bewitched at her spinning and so lost her fingers. A terrible example it was for iverywan to act careful."

"It makes me think of the way I feel when Auntie goes on about the 'Woopers.' It's such a lovely word, but I can't find anyone who will tell me what it means. Maury, *couldn't* you tell me?"

Maury got up suddenly. "Don't ye never sleep under a rug that the Woopers has made," she commanded. "Ye see, when the poineers dies off, the last one dead comes back to watch the ould people makin' the rug. They'd always be about ye if ye was to sleep under it. The poineers know that, av coorse. Ye moind what yer Auntie says. An' it's time you was home. Be off with ye."

"Here's a piece for yez." They took the bread-and-butter thickly strewn with brown sugar, with profuse thanks. But on the way home, while Aine's tongue yet savoured the first generous mouthful, she threw the rest of the bread on the ground.

"O my goodness!" she cried. "I never thought about the 'charm of giving and taking.' Suppose she had put a cow's hair in the butter!"

Beetrus was vexed at the suspicion. "She's as neat and tidy as anything. You needn't be afraid."

"Oh, you don't understand. She might have put the charm on me; if I took something that had the hair in it and started to eat it, something awful might fall on me."

"Oh, really, Aine, you are the silliest thing!"

"She likes me, I know," Aine asserted doggedly. "But you can't trust these old women. Perhaps she was vexed over our coming so often lately and staying so long."

"Well, I'm glad I'm able to eat the bread, anyway. You must be pretty hungry. She was rather stingy with her cookies, I thought."

"I've heard lots of queer stories about old Maury," said Aine, still in a muse over the gift of the bread. "As Ma said, 'she smelled of brimstone' in the old days. She let it be known that she could bring about love between a girl and a boy, if the girl put a charm she gave her into some fruit, a plum maybe, and got the young man to eat it. One girl told Ma she had charmed a man who did not care for her, by visiting old Maury; and in the end she married him.

"Of course, that sort of thing is real witchcraft, and after Ma heard that she never wanted to see her. Anyway, she didn't believe much in what she said, because of one of our fields that Maury was supposed to have cursed—and nothing happened at all. She had come to our house, you see, to get some holy water to sprinkle on her churn. 'The butter won't "come," ' she whined. 'Give me just a drop, now, of the holy water, that's a good soul, and a kindly deed to a neighbour.'

"And Ma said she hadn't a drop in the house and told her to throw the buttermilk out to the pigs so it wouldn't be wasted if the butter wouldn't 'come.' And Maury looked over the field that was growing up fine after the spring rains, and she said: 'There's never a binder will reap yon field. Mark my words, for They will bring it to pass.' But we never had such a good crop as we had that year. So after that Ma never worried over what she said.

"Ma never liked to have her round. I s'pose she would give me a lickin' if she knew I had taken you

there. You see, she's all right *now*, but years ago they all think she cast spells.

"Ma says that one day she came, sighing away because Ma had never heard from a brother who had gone away when she was a girl. Ma says they thought he had gone to Mexico and had been eaten up by the cannibals, because he always liked wild life. Ma had spent a lot of money on masses for his soul. And what do you think old Maury said? 'If I could get a letter to him he'd come fast enough. I'd see to it that he married one of my daughters. He'd come.' And Ma was very angry and told her flat that he was never a marrying man, even in his young days. But Maury just smiled in that queer way of hers, as if she knew something no one else did, and saying she would bring it to pass."

Beetrus was very unimpressionable. "Nothing gave *her* the shivers," she often said.

But just at that moment Joseph Henry, outstripping his followers, worsted in a fight, found the scent. A fearful yell, and the two girls took to their heels.

"You'd better run," he taunted, panting behind them. "We won't scalp you this time. Stop, I've something to show you, and then you'd better hurry home. Ma's come back."

"What's that you've got in your hand? Ugh!"

"I'm bringing these home to Pat's ma. He's coming after them. We had a bad fight with those other Injuns."

And, bearing two bloody teeth, the courier sped onward.

Beetrus had made up her mind. "I don't like the country," she said. "I'm going home to-morrow."

"Well, you can't say that you didn't have lots of fun this time, anyway."

"Ye-es," Beetrus admitted grudgingly. "But your people are so *queer*. I can't seem to get over those wake-pipes in the kitchen stove. Every little unexpected thing that means something awful!"

"Well, you don't have to smoke them."

The girls, tired and cross, were met by Mrs. Finnigan, righteous wrath in her eye.

In her hand she clutched a leaping, quivering willow-gad.

AUNTIE McCOOL WRITES HOME

WHEN Auntie kept house her "Janey's" world of routine underwent an astounding change; a whirlwind seemed to sweep through the place, depositing the wreckage in one corner by common consent assigned to "Janey." Still, the latter had days of a glorious sense of freedom and irresponsibility, recognising then in Auntie a kindred spirit.

"Ma" Finnigan had been stricken down with some malady that sent her to the hospital for a month. Auntie was not summoned, as it happened, Aine being considered old enough to take charge. But by underground channels Auntie McCool heard the news and, forgetting previous encounters with the farmhouse in Mrs. Finnigan's absence, came unannounced. She visited her neighbours for the first week, then she took the reins, but held them loosely enough. Some afternoons she would leave the house in utter disorder after the noon meal, threatening dire things if J. H. added his unappreciated touch; then she would wander in the woods, just awakening to the first breath of spring. And Aine, who went with her, was as careless and free in mind as herself.

Once they arrived at the farmhouse about five

o'clock very hungry, only to find that J. H. had been entertaining his Indian allies with fried eggs, stale bread and everything that was eatable; confusion and unwashed dishes drove Aine at once to the task of setting things right; but Auntie, after a cup of tea, demanded that Aine should act as her secretary. She must write a letter to her own family. When she once got started she enjoyed herself immensely. Every little while "Janey" rebelled. It was like a school composition which hung over her, in the days which followed. The letter had to be written in snatches—and eventually it was posted. But it was the first and last epistle she wrote for her aunt. Finding some amusement in so doing, she put Auntie down exactly as she talked.

DEAR MARY—

I got here just in the nick of toime to go to church; it being Good Friday no wan was expectin' to see me there. I don't be afther darkenin' the dures much, as you well know; me own sister Maggie goes twice a Sunday, an' ye all know she's worse nor the Divil.

I called in a good loud whisper to Janey—comin' back from makin' the Stations of the Cross—that I was in her pew, an' she could drive me to her ma's farm; but she niver let on she heard me. So when collection toime came I planked on the two half-dollars ye give me when I left—an' a foine clatter they made on the bare plate—iverywan turned to see who was givin' so much, an' they all talked about it on the way home, askin' if good money was made so quick as thot in the States.

Janey's ma, let me tell you, is sick at the hospital. It's not hersilf that will iver come out aloive. Yisterday, when Janey was mashin' praties, I says to her: "That's just loike where yer ma is, down in a frog-hole! She'll niver come back, don't think ut." That bunch of vagybones, Janey's brother

an' cousins, is on the rampage in the house all the toime, as ye might guess. When Bridget Jim comes back, if I stay till then, I'll see that she makes thim go down on their bare knees, for an Act of Contrition.

'Twas Wednesday week I looked in on young Mrs. Larkin, just as she was gittin' dinner ready for the hired men. Niver wan piece of pie did she have in the whole house, an' I tould her to her face 'twas a shame to sarve poor hungry men with the loike of the food she set for thim. A good Oirish pig wud think twice before he'd be afther atin' ut, I tould her. Thin she began to cry, bein' a poor-spirited thing—young, av coorse, and with not much sense—so I went on me way to the ould place. Sorra take the day I iver left ut.

Mrs. Mulvaney tould me of quare doin's. Her cat thot was always lazy but wise-loike, an' niver stirred from the kitchen stove unless it went to the barn, has gone no wan knows where. There was a white figger in a sheet seen late wan night by a bunch of young people, an' a cat was follyin' it round an' round the field. Then both thim things was gone in a flash. They think it is me ould granma, who isn't restin' any too aisy in her grave, maybe—an' that she's afther somewan to say prayers for her sowl. When I think of ut I do thot same, but she doesn't often come into me moind.

Mrs. Mulvaney tould me, too, that when ould man Dinnis sold all the horses they died on the man who bought thim an' took thim away. An' Dinnis had wished them well, for he threw an old boot over each wan an' said: "Fair weather to you an' snow to your heels." But there's niver luck with the broken-hearted horses when the ould folk sell thim.

'Tis the lovely country an' foine weather, birds singin' in the bush. A day of ut sets me up afther the dreary winter in the city with you an' your husband. Me heart is torn out av me with longin' to be back near the ould place. That's why I go berryin' an' stay with Janey's ma; not for the berries, but for the sake of goin' in the woods pickin' thim.

There's been wakes here enough to kape the place loively. I was to ould lady MacCormick's, last week it was. Just before death was on her she tried to get up an' make her bed—a sure sign she couldn't last long, even if her sons hadn't riddled the chaff in her room an' found it was all up with her. She

hadn't worked hard—sorra a line was on her face, but such rolls of fat on her chin. Tell little Annie she was the ould woman who used to come down in the marnin' an' say she had been pinched black an' blue by—you know who!

I've been visitin' ould friends in the village. Ould lady Rorke is sick enough. When I dropped in on her I says to her: "Mark me worrds, ye'll niver rise from this; make yer peace with the Lard while ye've toime an' say your beads good." I had thought she might be afther offerin' me a cup of tay, but as soon as I neared the place I heard the daughter hidin' the kittle from sight. Sure thot's the stupidest way thot family has of showin' ye hospitality. Iverywan knows they must have a kittle about if not in plain sight. They was dry enough thimsilves before I left.

Then there was a thravally[1] at the dure; some of their friends came an' I went to see the sick cousin of Maguire's wife. Av coorse they do be sayin' that no nurse will stay with her, she's that crotchety, but sick the poor thing was, an' accordin' to her tale little heed was ever paid to her cryin' out when she wanted annythin'. I tould her somehow or 'nother to get a good big stick into her hand. "Just you start poundin' for all ye're worth on the stove-pipe," I sez, "ye'll get quick steps comin' to ye thin."

In me own experience I've found poundin' for what I wanted did a power av good. The dint of ut worries them out av their wits afther a toime. "I'll bring yez a shtick next week," I sez.

They do be sayin' ould man Quinn is scrappin' awful with his daughter Stashy, since she's married. Ye know the ould sayin', "If ye make free with yer slippers they'll fly in yer face."

I forgot to say that our ould place has been blessed by a praste because the woman who bought it over me head, an' tuk away all the j'y of me loife, thinks there's spirits about. 'Tis the same tale of the onaisy restless cat, ye moind. It's been seen on her finces—"a witch if ever there was wan," she sez, an' there's no tellin' what other bag of bugfush she's vexin' hersilf with—"noises," an' the loike. 'Tis mesilf might come back if I was dead to give her a good scare, but she should

[1] Réveillé.

know better than scandalise the place by havin' a praste throw blessed water about an' sayin' his prayers there. 'Twas a dacint house when I was in ut—nothing's managed roight there, ye can aisy see thot.

I've got me pass on the thrain. The ould fella who's asked me for me ticket these manny years says he's toired of the clack of me tongue when I tell him as a poineer I shouldn't have to pay me fare. "All roight, ma'am," he says, "if ye'll only kape quiet ye can ride free for all of me. I'm toired of yer buzz in me ears."

Janey says her ma was still wearin' a hat instid of a bonnet before she went to the hospital. The gay dress she has for an ould lady loike her! Sure she'll niver come back to wear either. But if she should be spared, it's hopin' I am she'll be sobered a bit an' know the differ betune a young face an' an ould one. Janey says I'm behind the toimes an' bonnets is gone out of stoile long ago. I don't belave ut, an' that's flat. Janey is writin' this for me. She says her hand is toired an' I'd best stop. I hope she's put in all I tould her. Let me know if she's left out annything.

Yer Ma.

Auntie's reign ended in a blaze of general fury and consternation. It was the custom in the Settlement to set aside on a certain day a handful of oats, to sprout in water in a covered cup. It was not to be looked upon by mortal eye for nine days; then, if all had gone well, and a good harvest was promised from this augury, the oats would have sprouted. In that case the feast which had been prepared, and to which the connections of the family would have been invited, was a feature of the spring season, always eagerly anticipated. For, with the sure conviction that everything would go well, all were in high spirits.

"Janey" and Auntie worked with a will during the period when the covered cup held its mysteries of

divination in readiness for the fateful day. Together they made cakes and pies and cooked fowls and boiled a ham. Finally, the table was set, the expected guests had telephoned that they were on the way—and Auntie went into the pantry to look at the oats.

Then before Aine's horrified gaze, and as if it were part of a bad dream, the cloth was swept off and all the good things were thrown out of doors, well away from the house. Not a vestige of the food remained. Loud were the expressions of grief and disapproval as the relations arrived. What had happened to the cup with the oats? Let them but have a look at it. The cup was broken. Oh, this was simply unbelievable! Of course such a thing had happened once or twice in the old days—there was a possibility of a disaster, they grudgingly admitted. But the whole thing was absurd. The tradition was there, of course—Auntie was right in that. All the food prepared must be thrown out if the oats had not prophesied as they should.

Auntie pointed dramatically to the remains of the feast. If they thought they were all right, let them pick up the unbroken cakes, the ham and chicken at their peril. For herself she knew what she knew. "There was a Bad Member in the family."

The six people invited were very hungry—they did not believe a word of her story, they maintained —it was just a very poor sort of a joke, the thing Auntie McCool might do—but not one of them would fly in the face of suggestion and pick up a morsel. In pity

for poor Aine and the defrauded J. H. they invited them to go back with them and have a "bite." Auntie was left to face a scene of triumphant desolation.

Next day she departed. She, in the opinion of the family connection, was "a Bad Member of the family."

THE UNATTAINABLE NINTH

AINE rose early that fateful Friday. Fast she must all day, and fasting she must count the nine stars at night, repeating a prayer with each star. On the first Friday of the month, for five successive months, she had been "making the Nine Fridays" with her mother. The goal was almost in sight.

It would have meant a very wonderful thing if during that period she had been summoned by Death, which was her "wish." She might have prayed for other things, but once having chosen she might not change. The heavenly gates stood open to anyone persevering and fortunate enough to keep these Fridays, happily fated to escape storms, illness or forgetfulness. Had she not known Katy Mullins, languishing because she was not allowed to enter a convent, and in a moment's space granted a greater boon—*dead* on her eighth Friday, before the altar! Shriven she was, and certain of Paradise, though suddenly struck down.

Aine wished so much that she might have a like destiny. Life was pleasant enough: she, at sixteen, had no sin on her soul; but she was *exaltée*. Her mother, "making the Nine Fridays" with her—for always there must be two in the endeavour, not necessarily wishing for the same thing—had not fathomed her adopted

daughter's heart, and little dreamed of the intensity of her desire.

There were certain old women in the neighbourhood who "made the Nine Fridays" not for themselves, but for others. Aine could not bring herself to approve of one of these, Mrs. Mulcahy by name, who announced that she, with a crony, was trying to translate to Heaven "poor Sally Martin an' the child comin' to her. Shure an' hasn't she had trouble enough with all her childher and that drunken husband of hers? Better far she died an' went straight to her reward—little need of Purgatory there would be for the likes of her." No, Aine thought Sally Martin was the best judge of that. No one else should interfere.

With such weighty matters revolving in her mind, Aine looked with unseeing eyes into the autumnal dawn, waiting for the long hours of the sixth Friday to pass, before going on the three-mile drive to church. Her hands, fumbling on the window-sill, touched a pipe, Jim's new possession, which he had filled, not lighted, the night before. An impulse, incomprehensible to her ever after, led her to put the pipe for one instant in her mouth. Then with a gasping little cry she laid it down. What had she done? Nothing must rest on her tongue, not a pin, not the petal of a flower.

Gone the wonderful hope shining somewhere among the nine Fridays, so far apart. Gone, too, the mother's chance of attainment of her own particular desire, for if one failed in the compact both must begin over again.

Of what use to count the nine stars now? She had

tasted something, put something on her tongue—her chance had gone. It did not seem possible, for a moment, that she could face her mother's just wrath, her astonished accusations, her wails and laments.

Why had she done it? She did not know. It was Fate.

Then the storm descended. She scarcely felt the cruel pinch and angry blow. The woe of the spirit was upon her. She would never, never be able to "make the Nine Fridays." Something unforeseen, as trivial, as undreamt of as the pipe, would always come between her and that wonderful, radiant Peace, once almost within her grasp. Even if Death had not beckoned imperiously, through all those six months she had been ready, waiting, hoping for the summons . . . any morning, any night. . . . Now she would never have that blessed certainty of Paradise. She was not fit for the heavenly spaces. Who was she to have dreamt of escaping what must be?

All that day, by her mother's decree, she held in her hand her brother's pipe. Far heavier, an unseen burden weighed. She might never make the Nine Fridays. It was fated so.

Perhaps the tempestuous morning which had dawned with so ill an augury had something to do with the events of the evening. Certainly Mrs. Finnigan was raging about the house all day like a whirlwind, and the household was tossed on waves of sound and fury.

Aine, bearing the brand of the disgraced, was not allowed to help her, but must sit still and watch and listen to J. H.'s whispered jeering.

"Why didn't you smoke the pipe if you like the taste so much?"

Jim heard that one remark: J. H. did not venture another, but with a bruised arm and thigh sat glowering, nursing his revenge. It was not safe to be in the way when Jim looked like that.

Aine smiled at him faintly; she was very fond of the big, queer, silent fellow, who plodded along day after day at his hard tasks, waiting for the evening, when he would leave the summer world of the farm behind him, as his car shot out through the gates. Every winter he went north to work in the woods.

Mrs. Finnigan was generally careful of her own speech when she spoke to this strange, almost surly son of hers who yet saved her so much toil. But, in defence of her beloved J. H., she would not be silent.

"Either that spoilt lad does what I tell him, and leaves Aine alone, or I'll get out of here," Jim threatened, her violent reproach still ringing in his ears. "Lazy and good for nothin'—Aine there works twice as hard as he does, and she's not very strong."

"I'll do the managin' for J. H. and Aine," shouted Mrs. Finnigan, beside herself with wrath. "And if you don't like the way the place is run, you know what you can do."

The flame of anger that had swept over the nascent man left him, but a smouldering sullenness and determination remained, the culmination of many such scenes. Mrs. Finnigan, poor soul, had lost her son. No one saw him go, nor heard, at night, the whirr

of the motor as it sniffed the night scents on the country road—and spurred itself on by new stimulants of city odours.

Through the dreadful days that followed—for Mrs. Finnigan's grief was as terrifying as her short-lived anger had been—Aine watched for a sign that should come to her. It was months before Larry could tell her news; he had seen Jim in the city, driving a taxi, very fast.

Aine could picture him, whisking bewildered people around some of the curving streets, having a lovely time—while it lasted. "The city freedom!" Little did she know the mockery of the name.

Jim Finnigan, 64 St. Mary's Street, halted by a traffic policeman, trying to escape, knocks him down; haled to Court, fined. The Settlement read all about it in the city paper which was sent one individual by a friend. The reporter who had to make police-court doings interesting for a jaded set of readers "jazzed it up" a trifle. But Mrs. Finnigan was transported with joy. Tears ran down her face as she cried: "He's his mother's son, God bless him—an' why should he stop for any police, when he had done no wrong? 'Tis the city will learn him, and then he'll come back home."

But the city took Aine first, to "learn" her too.

Aine never tried "making the Nine Fridays" again. Mrs. Finnigan, some weeks afterwards, on one of her bright days, suggested it, but Aine gave an evasive answer. Mrs. Finnigan was making pies at the time.

"They say I'm good at the pastry, but I'm nothin' to your Auntie. A wonder she was in her best days. She allays laid her good luck with the pies to her bottle roller. It was an old bottle, Ainey, that she got when she first made her Nine Fridays, when she was a girl. She filled it with the holy water we got then, and she allays kept it, when it was empty. And she rolled her pies with it and nothin' else would she have.

"Well, one day a tiny mouse got into it, where it was layin' in the flour-sack, and it couldn't get out, and it died there. Do you think she'd give up the bottle? She rolled her pies, mouse and all. It fair took my appetite away, but I didn't dare tell her why I could eat no more of her pies. And I hadn't the heart to steal her bottle from her."

PART II

PART II

LARRY OF THE SEMINARY

WHENEVER the priest in the next parish was bothered with poor people and their troubles, he would exclaim, first or last: "Oh, go and have a talk with Father O'Shea."

The ones he'd help! Poor enough he was himself —"shabby and talking to any Protestant like one of his own flock," someone once said. His soutane was always well patched and darned—"while the breath in it holds out at all, at all," he would say. There was a story told of the priest and old Micky. A coat and shoes were badly needed for the old man, but were not forthcoming. So the priest gave him a soutane past praying for, and an ancient pair of boots.

"Micky," he said, "be a Franciscan friar around your house. You know each brother wears another's darned and mended habit—but don't go around the village with it on. And if the boys say anything, tell them the shoes you're in have walked on blessed ground."

"Now, is it your Riverence? Begorra, we thought for a minute old Micky was the praste!" But Micky had his answer pat, and they soon gave over their plaguing.

Micky got drunk so often, and then he would begin

to cry, as he always did in that state, because he had no children, his wife having died years before. And Father O'Shea would thump him on the shoulder and comfort him: "Never you mind, Micky. Just look at that great man Sir Wilfrid Laurier. Pity he was a Liberal; still, he was a good man and a Catholic, but he wasn't blessed with children. So do you take comfort to your soul. And walk straight, Micky, walk straight. Give up the drink."

And how he loved his jokes! At weddings they told of the old woman to whom the priest came unexpectedly when she was on her sick-bed. She had just time to slip a flask underneath her pillow. "What's that you have there, my good woman?"—"My beads, Father." —"I've lost mine" (and oh, the twinkle in his eye!). "Perhaps you'd give me the lend of yours." But he didn't press the point.

The queer old customs that he loved! Never a candlestick at a wake, but instead twelve candles set in a box in earth taken from the grave of the last one buried. At the grave-side he had a tiny spade which he set cross-wise, with one of the big spades used for digging; and he would have the bearers of the coffin go round it three times, that the dead might rest in peace. He could not endure the sight of flowers on a coffin. Some city people, coming to the Settlement for a wake, brought many flowers with them. He promptly ordered them kept in another room—"they must wait for the grave." "Flowers are for a bride," he said, "or for the first Communion of the little child; they are out

of place decorating or adorning a dead person; they do not go with the coffin. No wreaths of wax flowers, even, will I have on those over whom I read the last prayers. Wait you now till the coffin is in the earth. The flowers belong to the City of the Dead."

He had problems sometimes that were beyond him. Jimmy Donovan, for instance, who had lost all his little family in a fever, had "driven out the curse" by letting his sheep sleep in the house for three nights after the last corpse had been taken away. What was he to say about that? . . . "The Prods themselves have more sense," he said crossly, when speaking once of Patrick Mulvaney, "boss of his own shanty," climbing on All Souls' Night to the top of his roof-tree and saying the round of his beads for the dead who might be flying around him. "If he wanted to beat out the Good Sisters' praying, his bedside would have done."

But a more disturbing element than anything he had previously encountered was perplexing him on this autumn day. He had summoned Aine to him in peremptory fashion, for the matter was grave. He had come across a scrap of paper in Larry's writing—a poem, of all things! And Aine was its burden and refrain.

His kind old peasant face smiled at her reassuringly when his housekeeper ushered her into the plain little study where he read and wrote.

"Do you feel like a penitent?" he quizzed.

"I feel like the old woman who told me that when she went to confess to 'a scolding priest,' she had to pray hard to keep her temper, and she was like a rag and could do nothing for the rest of the day."

"What have you been doing to young Larry, child?"

He flung the question at her like a bomb.

"Larry?" she faltered. "Do you mean to say you're going to take even Larry from me? Can't we be friends, then?"

"Not while there are men and women in the world. Larry should know better, of course, but the fact is he's head over heels in love already, as I see you know very well. What will be the state of that young man in a year or so would make you wonder, wouldn't it now, if he's struck down like a wounded soldier, at his age. Larry, me dear girl, is a soldier in another army, enlisted long ago. He is not going to be lost to Holy Church because he thinks he can't live without a little maid on a farm who crept into his heart unbeknownst."

"I think a priest should feel himself that he is 'called,'" said Aine stoutly, though her face was very pale. "And Larry doesn't really want to be one. He'd make a fine professor—of athletics."

"That ready tongue of yours! He has a great gift, let me tell ye, and he doesn't know it. He is strong and manly, and all the boys would follow him anywhere. They reverence him almost, for he has a clean heart, and——"

The priest towered above the slight figure of the

girl, lost in a huge leather arm-chair. He pulled out his lower lip in a gesture that with him spelt dire perplexity. As his emotion rose he strode up and down the tiny room till he pervaded it with his personality. The walls shrank, and Aine and he were set upon a stage where there were unseen spectators in a mighty struggle of will.

("Yes, my dear old tyrant," Aine was thinking. "You can go through the hotel like a tornado at any hour of the day, right into the kitchen, searching for drunken loafers. And if you find any they'll rush for the back fences, frightened of your blackthorn stick which would play a tune of their shoulders fast enough. You do just as you please in the village. But I have never been afraid of your stick.")

"You must give him up, Aine," said the priest. "That boy can *speak* to people and make them listen. I can't. I drive them or coax them, but I don't inspire them, and I never will. You'll say it was folly to put me, who should be digging praties in County Mulranney, into the pulpit. I'm a duffer, Aine, a duffer. Learning was hard for me ever since I was a barefoot gossoon. I would give anything to have a tenth of the abilities that boy has got, and doesn't yet know how to use, of course. Give him to me, Aine. You can send him away, if you like. He'll be a better priest all his days because he loved you and gave you up. Just you remember that."

"Father, don't you remember when Larry and I were tiny things? I told you of it once. It was a Sunday

night, and clear cold moonlight. And he said: 'I'm going out to chop some kindling.'

"'Not on Sunday!'—I was horrified. 'Why, you know the Man in the Moon will come down and take you up there.'

"'I know,' he said. 'I want to go there, with you, Aine.'"

"Did he chop the wood?" said Father John.

"Yes."

"Well, he's learnt he can't have the moon and he can't have his Aine," said the priest in the truculent, authoritative tone he so often used in the pulpit.

"So you won't let him split any more wood? Is that what you are trying to tell me? I'm not thinking of myself. You don't understand. I'm trying to speak for Larry who isn't here to speak for himself."

The priest felt the implied reproach. "I haven't spoken to him seriously yet. I—I——"

"You needn't tell me. I know you are afraid of him."

The priest groaned. "You know me inside and out and there's no use my trying to frighten you. I haven't any skill in argument. And anyway my heart is fighting for you and against myself, so what's the use of trying? I can bluster with some people, but the only way I've got left now is to make you sorry for me——" He stopped as if considering a new line of attack.

"You are one of my failures, Aine. For all you seem so docile you're a little rebel at heart and I've always known it. Here you've been brought up very strict —what with larrupin's and penances we've done our

best by you—but you'd leave us to-morrow, Aine, though you'd always love and understand us. I know that.

"The boy has been spending his holidays here with me, his guardian, ever since he was a wee chap. He's my spiritual son, if you know what I mean, and very dear to my heart. I was a fool, was I, to let him play about with a golden-haired girl-child in the summer days? But that's past and done now. You've always known that he was vowed to the Church from his birth, for a great deliverance from danger his mother had. He's fond of reading, a real student. He'll go far, mark my words, he'll go far."

It grew dusky in the study, for it was late afternoon. By the open window a gnarled apple-tree stood, laden with fruit, and in the silence—for Aine never thought of interrupting the priest's brooding—an apple fell with a soft thud. How often she and Larry had eaten their fill of those rose-and-yellow beauties, while they talked of books and schools and future days!

Then, like a wave pounding in her ears, she woke from her reverie to hear the sound of the priest's voice, beating, beating against her heart's stronghold.

"The Church has watched over the lad like his own mother; she chooses the best—and why shouldn't she? Is anything too good for the Son of the Blessed One? Would you have him go back on his debt to the men who have made him? He's had the best of teaching, I've seen to that. It's not often a Larry Martin is born.

"Aine, if you knew I was going away would it make

any differ to you—to think you had made an old man happy before he died?"

"You're not going to die."

His smile held great sweetness in it. "In God's good time, my dear. No: but I'm leaving the parish; the bishop—and you know what I think about bishops—he can't leave me in the place where I can do my best work—I doubt I've grown old and useless of late? —but he must send me off to near-haythens, Aine. He says I'm the grand missionary spoiled. Did ye ever hear the like of that? And I can't even influence one slip of a girl by so much as an inch."

Aine looked, as he had intended she should, very penitent. Oh, but his last thrust had gone home! The news was a great shock to her. She could not imagine the parish without the dear figure in it.

The 'phone rang, and the priest went to answer it. "I've a sick call," he said, re-entering. "I must be off at once. Stay here a while till you feel like going home." He bent over and caressed her with his hand. "Remember, dead or alive, I'll come back, if I have to leave the village now."

The room seemed drab and dull, a moment ago full of colourful drama. All the countless stories of Father O'Shea's humour, gentleness, wrath, came over Aine like a flood. *Why, he was the Settlement,* full of the savour of its salt, last of the old-time priests.

Her heart was torn between her love for the good Father and her defence, as it seemed to her, of Larry's rights—the right of youth to choose for itself its own

path. "We might be living in mediæval times," she said to herself bitterly. She did not doubt that in time Larry would "get over it"—his love for her. She herself liked him so intensely, he seemed so much a part of herself that she had often wondered how she would face the time when he would be taken from her.

If they went away together? They could never come back. What Father John said was true. She would be ruining his whole life. "Perhaps it's just vanity," she thought. "I'm a coward because I don't really love him. I know how dreadful it is to fight the dead weight of people around you: you think you're brave but they press you down and you just can't fight—you're smothered; but if I really cared, surely I would not let him go like this? Well, then I've got to send him away. All the same, I don't want him to be a priest."

She was on her homeward way, but she flung herself against her old refuge, a tree. "Larry, you won't ever know how I fought for you. You ought to have your chance. Why did I ever come into things and make them think it was *that*? . . . Oh, I saw it coming, months ago. Well, he's just got to fight them."

In wild arguing and self-counsel she spent a fruitless hour. Larry found her then, her eyes covered by her arms, a hopeless little figure at the foot of the elm.

"Aine! Has someone hurt you? Are you crying? Do you know what's the matter with me? Has Father John——? But he doesn't know."

"I can't hurt people," she wailed. "And wherever

I turn I seem to be trampling on someone's heart. Give up the priesthood, Larry, but not on my account. It's that which tears me in two. We must both get away —and not see each other."

"Rot!" His tone was vehement. "Don't think that for a moment. But we've got to be careful, or they'll break us. They'll soon find out I'm not going to be a priest. Nice sort of one I'd be, feeling like this! And then they'll give in. They'll have to. But you——"

"No. If I ever went with you I'd ruin your life. I'm going now, Larry. Please don't urge me any more: it's no use. Father John is right."

But in the boy's heart there was one hope left—a forlorn one almost. He could still speak to Mrs. Finnigan. She had, in a sense, been a mother to him all these years—he knew she loved him, in her way. He knew, too, on the other hand, that Aine appeared to her in the light of an ungrateful individual whenever she thought of a future not associated with the Finnigan farm. But if he married the girl he had set his heart on, would not her mother be willing to give him this happiness?

Two days before he left for the seminary, Larry walked into the Finnigan kitchen and found his old friend and childhood adviser making doughnuts. Flushed and tired, she yet smiled at him in the familiar fashion—a stout, motherly woman, ageing fast through hard work, full of kind impulses and sudden furious passions. She saw at once that he was worried. "Tell me, Larry, what's on you this day?"

And he blurted it out like the veriest schoolboy. "I want to marry Aine. Tell me you will help me—if you spoke to Father John it might make a difference."

She was horrified. In the heart of every mother in the Settlement there lay the hope that one of her sons would be a priest and one of her daughters a nun.

"You'd give up being a priest? And break the good Father's heart! Why, I'd never forgive ye, never. Have you spoken to Aine?"

He was a bit evasive. "There was no need. She knows how I feel. I have seen her turn her eyes away when I look at her. Of course I know what she would say *now*, but if someone spoke for me she might think about it."

Mrs. Finnigan was much relieved to find that things had gone no farther. "She doesn't love you, that's what you have to remember. It will be the saving of ye. If Aine loved ye, that girl has a will on her she'd walk out of this kitchen before me face and say, 'I'll go with ye, Larry, to the city as your wife whenever you give me the word.' That girl! A care she has been from the day she came to me. And me never knowing how long the farm would be afther holdin' her. She's got some gaddin' gypsy blood. Don't I know all about the girl Desmond Finnigan would have married and brought to this house long ago?"—

"But I can persuade her—I have given up the idea of being a priest—I've thought it all out, you can't change me. I'll make a home for Aine somewhere else. But you've always been so good to me—don't you care

for me at all—care to help me? I must have her and I will, too. We're made for each other."

Mrs. Finnigan's face was like a thundercloud. Not often had Larry seen her like that, but he had heard tales of her wrath when she was roused. "I wouldn't lift me little finger to do a sin like that. What do you suppose Father O'Shea would say to me? The penance he'd lay on me! Have you thought of that? And all my hopes for ye as a priest. O wisha, wisha that I ever should hear the like of this from a boy that was like me own son!"

She threw her apron over her head and wailed aloud.

In a detached way he regarded her, quite unmoved by her distress. It was hopeless, then, to try to change her view-point. He picked up his hat from a chair and went out blindly to the brooding stillness of his beloved woods.

And Aine met him at a turn in the road, coming home from some errand in the village—Aine, with a new constraint about her, with a baffling difference somehow. The wild desire to plead with her was replaced by a dull and heavy ache of the heart—the feeling that everything was possible to those who were determined enough to mould life to their will died in him all at once, as he faced the unbelievable fact: he could not carry her off her feet by the impetus of his own passion; there were intangible forces working against him.

Aine began to speak hurriedly, as if afraid of things unspoken. "I've just been leaving a parcel of things

—woollen stuff—at Mrs. Fahey's gate. She's going to have a 'bee' for her rugs. Do you remember the old red-and-green 'ganzeys' the men used to wear? I couldn't find any of those in the house, of course—they were the choice bits for the dyers in the old days. All the strips of shirts I've helped to cut up for the hooked rugs. I can see those old dames now in their flour-sack aprons banded with Derry blue, working at the frames. J. H. and I had to do a good deal, but what fun it was listening to the stories and then enjoying the fresh raisin bread and all the good things. That hot, steamy smell of molasses!

"If I ever leave the Settlement I'm going to take away a quilt I once saw made in 'pine-bloom and monkshood' design. I wouldn't wonder if our descendants would treasure them as they may the old walnut they're beginning to pick up—— You are not listening to a word I say."

"Never do." He managed to smile at her. They walked on together towards the farmhouse almost in silence He was sick in mind and body, and she who might heal him at a touch could only stretch out her hand in eternal farewell, while she fenced herself about with idle words. His own hurt blinded him for the time to the pain in her eyes. Larry was going away, going in two days. And she might never see him again.

Even when the final chance came—when there was so much to be said—they could say nothing.

In his heart there was a vague resentment against Aine. She would not help him in his fight for her.

They two, they two could have done anything. But how could he fight alone? Somehow, he felt, his love should have kindled a responsive flame in her—she was not ready for it—she was subdued by the Settlement and Mrs. Finnigan.

A weakling? Too passive? Not in reality: she had fire and spirit enough, as he knew. But why could he not sound the chord in her to which his whole being thrilled? Evasive, she warded off her own rescue, thinking too much of his career. O foolish little Aine! He was never going to be a priest. It was wiser to make the decision now. Together, they would have been so strong——

"Won't you come into the house?" she faltered at the gate.

"No; I was there—talking to your mother. Oh, I've only made a mess of things, made things worse for you, Aine, I'm afraid. And they were bad enough before. But if they ever get so you can't stand them, run away to the city, and I'll find you there. I have friends who would help you."

A window slammed suddenly in the farmhouse. A tremulous smile lit Aine's face. "Larry, if it hadn't been you, something else would have set her off. The day she makes doughnuts I stay out of the kitchen. I'm not afraid, only so sorry—so awfully sorry, to have you go. Good-bye."

She ran into the house, passed Mrs. Finnigan like a flash, and so gained her room which she barred by pushing the small bureau against the door. She did

not come down till the next morning. And then Mrs. Finnigan, her fury long over, her sense of a settled world assured, said never a word.

A year from the day Father O'Shea went away from the parish he came back to his loved ones. But he lay still and quiet before the altar, and the pulpit from which he had thundered and counselled was draped in black. "He took it very cool," they said, "when he knew he was going to die." There were no flowers on the coffin; in ignorance, but with kindly intention, the Protestants sent wreaths. But these were kept in the vestry until the priest was interred, even though there was danger of insulting the donors.

As chief mourner Larry walked unseeingly behind the coffin, resolute, cold, aloof. Later, during the service, his eyes sought the Finnigan pew almost opposite. Aine was there, crying unrestrainedly. But in that second she caught his accusing look (yet to her afterwards there seemed in it, as well, love and longing and pleading).

And the hardness that had welded him to its will, steeling him by what had seemed to him weakness on her part, was indeed suddenly gone. She was a girl hard-beset, he was thinking. Perhaps she was not so much to blame as he had felt in his sore heart all these months.

Father O'Shea had delivered a message, supposedly from her: "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me . . . " He had had his life orders,

then. Very well: he would go through with it, this business of getting each day over somehow and dreading the one to come. No one at the seminary seemed to guess that there was anything out of joint in his world. But this day as he sat in the pew his heart leaped up at the sight of the beloved face, and tears that were not all for the dead priest blurred his vision. . . .

THE STARCH OUT OF AUNTIE

"I'm not going to stay on the farm all my life." Aine, how many weeks, months, years since you said that? You are twenty-three this rainy day in Auntie McCool's tiny bedroom at the Finnigan farm and soon the Settlement will be saying up and down the Lines checking the Concessions: "Aine's an old maid now —she's on the shelf." You don't mind—much—but listen to what Auntie is saying as she lies fevered in her bed:

"'If ivery cat was as catcheous as she is snappy, there wud be no birds in the bush.' Ye've heard me say that, manny's the toime, Janey. I don't loike to see the way thim other gurls gits all the b'yes goin' for husbands—an' ye left lonely an' sighin'. 'Twas not loike that when I was young."

Auntie began to hum an old song, *Jack of the Leather Breeches*:

> "Hedges an' ditches, I tore me ould breeches,
> Leppin' over the ditches
> To get salley-switches
> For my Mary Ann."

"Yet you've told me often enough how they used to set great store by the real old maids," said Aine.

"Didn't the old Irish think they were just about ready for heaven on this earth?"

"Terrible few of them there were," sniffed Auntie. "An' they did a power av worrk in lookin' afther their ould fathers an' mothers, wid niver a complaint out av thim. Salt av the airth they were."

The rain streamed down the bedroom windows; "the starch had gone out of Auntie" with a vengeance. The day before, coming home from berrying, very hot and tired, she had called for two pails of cold water, "to set in, up to me knees." And in spite of violent family protest she got them. She was to-day the victim of insistent desires, flat on her back, with "Janey" to nurse her. The latter was the only one allowed in the room, as all the rest were intent on getting in "I-told-you-so" first.

"Well, you good people wouldn't let me marry Larry —supposing I had wanted to—because he was cut out for a priest. But I'm not sighing for anyone and I'm certainly not 'snappy,'" said Aine from the book to which her eyes were constantly straying. "The girls here are welcome to the boys roundabout. Didn't you know, Auntie"—and she drew a great breath for her sudden audacity—"didn't you know I've a young man in Toronto? 'When all fruit fails, welcome haws,' you know."

"Divil a bit!" Auntie murmured morosely. She was not in the least impressed. It was most disappointing.

"Ye'll be marryin' a Prod, I suppose, wan of these

days? Is thot what ye're thryin' to tell me? 'Teeter, totter, holy water, sprinkle the Proddys ivery wan.' That song makes me think of the ould days on the Fermoy Line when the Prods on the Nazareth Line were stronger. An' they didn't stop at worrds. By the Fermoy Cross there's been fightin' enough, and 'tis haunted to this day. On the Sivinteenth the women lay in their beds in fear, an' no wonder. Up an' down marched the Prods with their guns, darin' the Fermoy men to come out. I've seen ould Flannagan mesilf lookin' grim enough, blinkin' his red eyes an' watchin' his handsome young grand-nevvys prancin' about in his rusty brown-green knickers, an' his coat with a long tail to ut, an' his green silk stock an' high silk hat that come from Oireland. Well, Janey, ye may laugh at him now, but there was few in his prime that would have dared to do that same.

"He was the bould lad if ye loike, an' he'd face the Prods when they was few enough who wud folly, on the Sivinteenth, in the days gone by. His ould shtick has fought its way round Oireland, as he used to say. . . ."

O dear! Auntie was off again in one of her tirades against the Prods. "If I could only get her to talk about her days of 'coortin'," Aine thought, in desperation.

She fell asleep, fortunately, and when she woke, quite amiable, Aine brought up the reprehensible actions of the young girls in the vicinity, a never-failing "cue." "But all the same, I don't see how

people ever got married in the old days, with everybody watching them so closely."

"Great match-makers some of the ould Oirish were. It cost some av thim a rale fortune in dinners when they didn't have much luck an' had to kape on entertainin' for months mebbe. Firrst av all the mothers would put their heads thegither. 'My Pathrick, now, how wud he be afther suitin' yer Mary?'

"'Faix, an' we might have liked the match well, but wisha, didn't that young Jerry of Donovan's call on her last Sunday night! Mebbe she's taken a fancy to him, an' av coorse his comin' on Sunday night looks baad enough. By Gennis, though, we might be afther gittin' the young folks thegither, later, eh? I'll talk ut over with the ould man.'

"Thot wud mane thot there'd be a duck killed soon, for Pathrick's parents and thin Mary's father an' mother would be bid to a foine shpread. Later on the young people wud be havin' a 'gatherin',' mebbe fifty or sixty, an' no joke it was feedin' thim from then on, by toimes, till it looked loike a match.

"An' the ould folks would be afther watchin' through peep-holes how things was goin', pretty anxious-loike sometimes. There was wan ould match-makin' mother I've heard tell of would niver lave her daughter be alone wid the young man, an' av coorse, as she had so little sinse, nothin' come of ut at all and her purse was near ruint entoirely.

"But mostly they wasn't brazen at all but managed things modest-loike. It was expinsive, though, when

a pore sowl had many daughters and girls had fancies, or young fellas had an eye on another farm.

"What's thot ye say? It's thrue enough I was married with a straw band. Wan woman they tell of had no better than the key-ring to a pair of skates.

"A month afther the weddin' I was *hauled home* by me frinds; an' me ould man, who was young and well-set-up thin, av coorse, come out from our place to meet me and said, as he should have said: 'I would rather have ye than a hundred milch cows.'"

"Why do you say 'as he should have said'?"

"'Twas the proper answer, av coorse, at that toime. An' ut would have been the worse for him if he hadn't said ut. An' well he knew ut."

Auntie subsided crossly. But Aine tempted fate once more and to her own astonishment got one more answer to one more question.

"Auntie, I want you to tell me to-day, like a dear, all you know about Mrs. Finnigan's adopting me. Old Father O'Shea once said my mother was 'a beautiful lady,' but that's all he would tell me. Don't you know *anything* about her? Who was she?"

Auntie glowered at her. "Father O'Shea is dead and gone. God rest his sowl. He was the only wan who knew where ye got yer purty hair that looks like a wheat-field with the moon on ut, an' thim bluebell eyes. I think mesilf 'twas a foine leddy she may have been an' very ginteel. But the ould praste would just hint an' tease, an' if I'd go down on me knees he'd say:

'Be off wid ye, woman. 'Tis an ould gossip y'are. Lave a story be.'

"'Lave a story be,' I'd tell him. 'Lave ut wid me in the house ut came from. I'd niver tell a sowl an' not a worrd to young Janey—not a worrd would she iver git from me.' So that set him considherin'——"

"Yes?" Aine prompted breathlessly. At last, at last was she to know?

"An' it's afther considherin' I am mesilf. The toimes they sint for me to luk afther yez all! Yer ma, Mrs. Finnigan, I mane, had throubles wid Finnigan, she near wint out of her moind. An' ye wint to the convent an' the separate school in the city. An' a foine eddicated gurrl y'are this minnut; faix an' I'm proud of ye.

"When Jim Finnigan died, Bridget Jim there done her best to be a mother to all of yez. Not but what I cudn't have done betther on the job mesilf, av coorse. But, come hidin's or good males, there was no differ betune you, when you was children; Bridget Jim was that fond of ye as a baby. . . ."

Auntie's voice trailed off vaguely. Her work-worn hand strayed fumblingly over a smoothly banded head, bent low in the tossed blankets at the side of her bed. Aine's eyes were hidden, storm-swept. Of course she had always known, in a way—she was different. . . .

"Niver moind, dearie. There's allays ould Auntie. Hush yer cryin' an' git somethin' to eat. Bridget Jim there wud lave me starvin' till I was skin an' bone. . . . Shut the dure, quick. She might be afther comin'

in an' throwin' thim pails of wather in me face. I wudn't put it past her."

She was rewarded for her sally by a rainbow smile. "A poached egg, then, Auntie?"

"Three av thim," said Auntie firmly

THE BOARDING-HOUSE AND BEATRICE

BEATRICE—she insisted on all her syllables nowadays —was engaged to be married to Van Bradburn. Long ago he had been forced to give up the game of writing, which he loved, but which did not promise much in the way of a future to the young reporter—and he had gone in for dentistry, because of a chum's success in the work. Good-humoured and skilful, Van, too, had built up an excellent practice.

The news of the coming wedding found Aine, one spring morning at the farm, feeding the chickens. She hated chickens, always under one's feet. Silly things. . . . Beatrice was not the kind of girl Van should marry—so extravagant. Why, she'd never let him save a cent! O well. . . .

Then Aine smoothed out the crumpled letter and discovered that she was asked to be in at the triumph. She was invited to spend a month at the boarding-house, scene of her childish trials.

"You said your teeth were bothering you. Better come up and have them done while Auntie Finnigan is a little bit flush. Van's got to buy a lot of things for my home, of course. I'm going to make Auntie Methuselah fork out, too. She needs false teeth the worst

way. Get her to come up when you do. She can stay at the widow Donovan's. Bring your prettiest clothes. I want Van's family to like my little country cousin. Of course Auntie M. won't be a shock to Van, for they've met each other before, and he expects the worst. You remember when you asked him to go down for a wake. Didn't she do something dreadful that day? I forget what it was."

Of course Auntie was what Beatrice would have called "a perfect scream" about getting her few remaining teeth extracted and having others in their place. . . . But Aine wanted to go to Toronto. . . . Auntie had to submit with a very bad grace, deciding that she could dodge the dentist when she got there.

Aine, however, was determined that Auntie must be "furnished forth" before the wedding, and while the time was opportune. With regard to "the little bill," that could wait, surely. As between the interests of Beatrice and Auntie there was simply no question which would win out.

So it came about that on the day a frightened old woman, trying bravely to hide her fears, sat in a dentist's chair and regarded the world and the strange young man before her suspiciously. She did not remember Van, as during his brief visits to the farm she saw him, casually, but once.

"Lave wan or two in," she mumbled. "I loike the feel av thim in me mouth. Years ago I could have broke an axe wid me teeth that's gone now."

"I'm afraid that's impossible." (Eh, but he was high-

handed. As if she couldn't keep her own teeth!) "Not if you want a plate. Your niece told me——"

"Plate or platter 'tis all wan to me," she said, suddenly giving up. "Do yer worrst. Ye can't shpoil what's shpoilt already."

"Freezing" turned out to be a thing for a baby. That he should have tried it on her, braced as she was for terrible pain! She was highly incensed, and he gravely but immensely amused. Later, came the fitting of the plate which was much more trying to all concerned. She simply wouldn't keep it in her mouth. In intervals of effort she insisted on smoking the pipe with which she had provided herself. She was particular about pipes—she never liked new ones—"I'd not give a thankye for yer gift"—so Aine "collected" for her benefit.

"Sure, the young dintist in the village—and why didn't I go to him, now?—he says he enj'yes it when the old ladies sits an' smokes betune one tooth out an' another."

But in spite of this solace she was very bitter when she left the office. "All I've got out av me thrip is the losin' of two good stumps in me gooms!"

As for Dr. Bradburn, he got Experience. Beatrice seemed to think it was his fault. Really, Beatrice at times was the limit. Sometimes he wondered . . .

Meanwhile his quaint little country girl was in town. It always made him happier to see her. They had such fun together and he teased her so.

Aine forgot all about her own teeth until Beatrice

reminded her. Then she felt suddenly shy. Shy with good old Van? How absurd! She had excuses for a time, but finally a bad tooth asserted itself and the pain sent her in short order to the sure and deft relief that Van would afford.

His face lit up when she came into his well-appointed office.

"Just had a mother in here," he grinned, "who made her four-year-old sit still while waiting for me, with the threat: 'If you dare to move, that man will pull out all the teeth you've got.' She sure will love dentists when she grows up."

"Never mind, Van," Aine retorted gaily. "You know you will always have plenty of sweet young things who will."

"Well, I've always got you to fall back on if Beatrice turns me down," he teased.

"You know you've held that conviction ever since I knew you. I suppose I did flatter you by the way I hung on your lightest word in those days. But children grow up, Conceited One, and they meet Other People——"

"How's Larry?" he interjected.

"You mean the Rev. Father Lawrence Martin, as he will be one day? Don't look so surprised. You heard he was not going to be a priest? Oh, but he is! He'd be glad to know you were so interested in him."

Van murmured something unintelligible.

She sat down demurely in the office chair. "My

tooth aches dreadfully," she complained. "And if you *have* become a silly grown-up thing, you might at least take a professional interest in me. I don't see why you gave up reporting," she went on, as he made his preparations to relieve her. "You were a first-class liar always. A real career spoiled!"

"But I never could put anything over you! What is it, child, what touchstone do you possess——?"

He broke off shortly, his tone having suddenly become grave and serious. "What fun we had, Aine, when I used to go down to write up the wakes and weddings for my specials! You know your people are survivals, and the most delightful things to write about, but all the same they have, collectively speaking, a nasty disposition, when it comes to regarding anyone who isn't of their own faith. As for marrying into them! Whew! Can you imagine Auntie McCool—"

Aine looked decidedly cross.

"Of course, if a man is afraid of his own skin——" she began scornfully.

"*Afraid!*" he repeated, with ominous self-control. Aine knew that tone. "I suppose you mean when Paddy Corkery chased me off his farm after he had read the article I wrote?"

Aine jumped out of the chair. "If you think I'm going to trust myself to a man who looks like *that*, you're much mistaken," she announced. "I wouldn't mind marrying a reporter who can sprint with the best of them, but I draw the line at a dentist who hovers over you ready to attack——"

He caught hold of her arm and pushed her back into the chair. "You wait until you are asked, young woman," he said. And then they both laughed.

It was half an hour later, when they were both amicable, and he was untying the "bib" around Aine's neck, that he suddenly bent down and kissed the nape of her neck. He was aghast the next moment at what he had done, for little "liberties" were not in his line, and he knew her upbringing and surroundings.

Rising, she faced him, and he was remorsefully aware that he had done her some hidden injury. The old bright child-look was gone, and instead, it seemed to him, her eyes were upbraiding. (Hers was a pre-war upbringing, dear girl of to-day!)

"Aine," he stammered, "I'm most awfully sorry. You know what a lot I think of you. It was just—that you were so sweet—I couldn't help it."

She decided to laugh it off. "Goodness, are you trying to apologise for kissing me just as you would a nice fat rosy little infant of four? I know you persist in thinking I'm never going to grow up. Good-bye, Young-Man-About-to-be-Married-to-Beatrice."

He followed her lead.

"Why don't you like her more than you do? She's a good sport, you know." He was sparring for time, and scarcely knew what he was saying. Soon the door would close on her, on his little Aine. And she'd never have anything more to do with him, he felt sure.

"Don't you remember that we were always quarrelling as children? For one thing, I'm a Catholic."

The door was shut.

Aine could not have kept it up any longer. Halfway down the stairs she sat down and tried to get a grip on herself.

But this was awful! Was she in love with the man who was to marry another girl within a month? All the Irish modesty, inculcated through long years by Auntie, revolted at the idea. She did not blame Van in the least. "I've wanted to kiss people like that," she thought. One thing was sure: she would have to go back to the farm. She could never stand seeing all the preparations for the wedding.

And to-morrow evening they were to go for a motor drive into the country—she and Beatrice and Van. Surely she would not have to give up that! To her consternation she found that this was an event which she had been anticipating as a child might look forward to some coveted treat.

The next day, Beatrice, who had been entertained frequently by her circle of friends, felt the effects of the unwonted gaiety. She could not lift her head from her pillows. The drive would have to be given up, but in a rarely generous mood she suggested that they go as they had planned. "Take Auntie; you can 'phone her at Mrs. Donovan's."

Mrs. McCool was excited over the idea. Go? Of course she would. She would sit in the back and Van must

promise not to drive more than fifteen miles an hour, Mrs. Donovan said. "Is he anny good at handlin' a cyar?"

"He's just fine," said Aine in a gay voice. She should have sent a little tune in her heart back to its covert, but it sang on unreproved.

And then the usual prosaic boarding-house meal was over. Van had come, laden with flowers, had sat with Beatrice a few minutes, and then she sent him away: "Be sure and have a nice time. Auntie ought to be as good as a play."

Mrs. McCool was undismayed by country roads but had never been driven in the city. Van liked to manœuvre a bit with "the bird" ahead of him—which is one way of putting it, as Aine told him. In mortal terror, Auntie clashed the huge beads of her rosary with one hand while she essayed to direct his course forcibly with the other. "Go aisy!" she screamed. "Take me back to the widdy's as fast as ye can."

Van was worried. This would never do. "Guess I'll have to take her back, and then we can have a little drive into the country and get home about nine. Shall we, Aine?"

"No" was on her tongue, but she found herself saying without a qualm: "That would be just lovely."

With Auntie, severely shaken and disillusioned, deposited at the widow Donovan's, everything was plain sailing on a highway that was not an ocean, nor cemented earth, nor sky, and yet had, to Aine, an

element of all these. Van's prowess at the wheel delighted her—how sure and skilful he was! There was a faint, elfin moon; shadows of flitting trees, elusive fragrance from gardens. Motoring, always a delight, calmed and soothed her. She was utterly happy now, quite content to know that she loved Van and was his great friend—and would never be anything else.

"HEAVY, HEAVY HANGS OVER THY HEAD"

He was in one of his most delightful moods—his "Aine excitements" as he termed the chats in which a high gaiety was the chief note. Clever fooling, bits of nonsense and capping of climaxes—all such good fun.

"What time is it?" she said, with a start. "We've gone *miles*." There was tragedy in her tones. "Oh, we must go home at once!"

"All right. I'll put on a bit of speed and Daisy'll take us in at a clip she's always game for if I push her."

Alas for Daisy! She balked.

Van had forgotten to fill her up with sufficient gasoline for that long and unexpected drive into the country. Such a silly thing to do, as everyone always points out to the shamefaced. If it had been a thrilling accident, now!

They were miles from anywhere, on a silent, shrouded country road. It was eleven o'clock. Unbelievable, but true.

"Walk with me to the farmhouse—are you game? Oh, *what* a fool I've been to get you into this mess!"

They walked rapidly, in silence. Both were thinking: What will Beatrice say to us when she knows?

"My lady can say what she hang well pleases as far as I am concerned," was Van's mental conclusion. "But

what will she say to this poor child? She is sometimes so hard."

"She'll think I did it on purpose," wailed Aine's second self. "She'll say I ought never to have gone alone with Van; that I 'worked' it. Oh, I know she'll never believe me—about the gasoline."

Finally a farmhouse loomed up, and the situation was explained to the annoyed occupants, who had gone to bed early.

"There's a garage two miles on. The young lady can stay here with my wife till you come back, and you can borrow my wheel."

Hours after, it seemed—but they had lost all track of time—Daisy brought them to Beatrice's door. Aine had her latch-key. A light was burning in Beatrice's room and in the parlour.

"I'm all right," Aine said, making a brave show. "No, you must not come in. I'll tell her. She'll understand, and you can come early to-morrow and get your scolding over."

Beatrice, a wan-looking apparition in her *négligée*, met her in the hall. She motioned her to the parlour. "Go in there," she said. As Aine, dazed and wearied, obeyed without demur, a woman in the uniform of the Salvation Army rose from a sofa to greet her.

"Here she is at last," said Beatrice. The major put her hand on Aine's shoulder.

"It was all a mistake, I'm sure, but we'll talk it over in the office at the lodge. You can sleep there to-night. Mrs. Prentiss and her daughter have explained

to me their feeling in regard to you. They think you should be under some supervision for a time. I'm an old friend of the family, so I came to help them out of an awkward situation——"

"Here's her bag." Beatrice shoved Aine's valise into her hand, which closed mechanically upon it. Apparently she must go on somewhere else. It was very tiresome, for she was so sleepy and used-up. She couldn't seem to talk, but anyway Beatrice was too furious to listen.

The door closed with a bang and Aine as in a dream was led to a taxi that seemed to have sprung up by magic just outside the door. She was so tired that nothing mattered, not even the key grating on the outside of the lock of her door. She flung herself on the hard little white bed and was asleep in a second.

The matron was very kind next morning.

"It's not a catastrophe and everlasting calamity, my dear girl. It's just one of those things we can't help, life being what it is. I believe your story absolutely and I quite see how you can't go back to the farm till things blow over a bit. It's astonishing how the months go by, and people forget, more often than not. A few will always remember, but it doesn't matter even about them in the end. 'Work' is my gospel."

She knew a tea-room where Aine would fit in perfectly as waitress. ("Yes, she is an attractive little thing," was her mental summing-up, "but able to take care of herself, I should say, judging by that chin.")

So, a fetching cap surmounting the pale-gold hair,

and in Quaker grey and dotted white muslin, Aine was prettier than ever. She liked the work amazingly. Tired she was often, clumsy she felt herself to be sometimes, through nervousness. But everyone was "nice" to her.

"You're the kind of girl that women call 'dear,'" said another waitress to her. "They say it without thinking. They don't mean it, you know, but they don't say it to everybody. You've a queer way with any man who gets 'fresh,'" she went on. "You don't say much, but they don't do it again, just the same."

Aine smiled to herself. Sometimes she wondered what she would do if Van came and ordered lunch, from behind a paper, and then should look up and see her. She had written to Auntie, who had delivered herself of a tirade against Van. "He druv loike the very ould Nick. Don't you never have no more to do with him. He sint a line to me sayin' wud I be so very good as to sind him yer address. Faix, I sint somethin' to him he won't fergit in a hurry, but ye can have yer alibi safe. He won't git it out av me."

As for Beatrice—"She and that ijit were a pair. I hear they had a tremenjus quarrel an' the weddin's all off. Mrs. Prentiss won't spake to the widdy Donovan, because she says she should have tould me to be sure and stay in the cyar for shappyron. I was spared by Hivin's own grace, an' I knew ut whin me trimblin' laigs stood on the piazzy. 'Go aisy,' I says to him over an' over. I'm sorry it happened, but I don't blame you annyhow. It's all for the best, but that's

what come of associatin' with relations who aren't Catholics. Some day I'll be afther havin' a swat of tay at your place, an' I'll expect you to wait on me good. I can't eat rock cakes with me new plate, but sometoimes annythin' else goes down. I don't want no fancy prices charged. The widdy tould me that at some of thim eatin'-places they charged tin cints for to-maytoes. I wudn't belave her in most things but that might be true. An' here they're lyin' on the ground for the hens to peck at."

Aine, finding herself in a new world, ached with the sense of the old one left all unfinished, with ragged edges. What had that violent quarrel been like between Van and Beatrice? After all, wasn't it natural that the engaged girl, and in love after her fashion, should have been suspicious of a girl coming home with her lover so late?

No. It was just jealousy, her own rational self agreed. Beatrice had never dreamed that Aine could be a rival—country born and bred, "queer," negligible, as she thought her.

But every time that Aine and Van met on terms of grown-up camaraderie, their friendship had taken on a new light, which the woman's intuition felt to be significant, but which the man, slower to analyse, had not realised until he was called on to defend.

As one of the city's lonely ones, aloof, hurt, making no effort to fit in, Aine began to hate the surging crowds, in which she was daily lost, as she had never

detested the farm. She thought of looking for work in small towns, imagining that there she might be happier. She would see a lawyer about her inheritance from Aunt Liz—she might be well off; although she had always had to be content with a small allowance. Where was her money—in a bank? She must find out. Or she could go to evening classes and take up stenography.

Once she saw Van go past the window—she would have known him anywhere. But though her feet moved of their own volition to the door, and she heard herself calling his name—"Look at me, Van—don't you see me?"—it was all under her breath, all controlled by the situation in which she found herself, with alien eyes watching every move.

A man at the tea-table grew impatient and with a great effort she turned from the door. Would she really have gone out on the street and called him? she wondered, afterwards. She had had no idea of the force that strove to pull her where she wished so much to go

DESSERT FOR TWO

It was Christmas Eve. Aine knew what was before her that twenty-fourth day of December when she woke to a grey dawn in her tiny room in Mrs. Plaice's boarding-house. But she had not visualised the rush which catering meant in the busy tea-room on the eve of the festival. She was so utterly fagged out when she struggled up the steps of 42 Wendover Street that she quite forgot that Christmas might have any personal meaning.

But on the threshold she remembered with a start that she had no blessed candle to put in the window. Every Christmas that she could remember it had been part of the holiday ceremonial. Then she saw on her dresser a charming little pink candlestick with a candle like a rose blossoming there. Her landlady had remembered her remark of a week before—that she must find time to buy a candle to put in the window on Christmas Eve. Poor Mrs. Plaice! So kind of her, but of course she did not know that it was useless, unless it had been blessed.

In the cheerless little room Aine flung her coat and hat on a chair, and sought her bed for cold comfort. There she fought out her loneliness. At first she did not hear the hurried knocking on her door, but at

length she opened it. Myrtle Plaice was there, sent by her mother to say that there was a visitor below—yes, on the stairs, coming right up. Then she heard Auntie's voice raised in a tirade against dark stairs and stupid people who blocked her way—"And niver a candle in the windy. A dishgraceful house, no less!"

Aine laughed aloud, all her weariness forgotten. Oh, it was good to see Auntie again.

"Put on yer things this minnut," she commanded. "Ye're goin' home on the eight o'clock thrain. 'Tis no place for ye here at all, at all."

"Going home." After all, it was home, at Christmas time, anyway. They would have to forgive her then for any and all misdeeds—even if she was supposed to "have sold her soul to the Devil." They thought she wanted to marry a Protestant. Knowing the Settlement's views on the subject she forgave them, but she looked for practical ostracism outside her own household.

"They don't want ye, av coorse," Auntie agreed, "but ye'll get bite and sup that'll be warmin'. I'll see to thot."

She picked up the gewgaw candle and looked at it curiously. "What like is this? Not for yer windy?"

"O *no*!" Aine cried happily. "Just to look pretty."

While she dressed hurriedly Auntie was explaining the suddenness of her appearance. "Larry came to see yer ma, as he used to do long ago in the holidays—she used to think the world av him, but she'd heard stories—annyways thot woman is the vi'lent wan if

she gits thinkin' long and broodin'. What does she do but shut the dure in his face and yell, 'She's not here. Ye'd betther be huntin' for her in the city, an' God knows where at thot.'

"In a great takin' he was. An' he give me the money for to come an' find ye an' bring ye home."

Aine's eyes filled with unwonted tears. Dear old Larry, worrying over her like that! But of course he would wonder where she was and what she was doing, alone in the city—not afraid for her, but knowing what loneliness meant.

"I haven't any home, Auntie, but I'll go back with you for the holiday, just because it's Christmas."

"Who's that at yer dure?"

Aine exclaimed: "O dear! I forgot all about Mary Sillifant. She was coming to do my hair, for I was going to a little party to-morrow at the——" (No, better not say Y.W.C.A. in Auntie's hearing.)

"Yer hair's all right," Auntie began, but Aine was ushering in little Miss Sillifant, a young fellow-roomer who had just taken up hairdressing again, and was glad to get practice. She began to work deftly, promising Aine ample time to catch her train. Auntie, however, fumed and fussed throughout the process. The two girls talked in undertones. Aine turned to her visitor and, to placate her a little, repeated something Miss Sillifant had said.

"See, Auntie, here's a withered rose she's kept for two years in her purse. She was telling me how lovely the Protestant funerals are in the cities——"

"Yes," said the hairdresser, taking up the tale, as was expected of her. "Have you ever seen one, ma'am? The way they adorn their coffins with flowers would surprise you. This rose came from a perfect bank of flowers; under them lay the lady I once worked for when I began—private visits, you know. I thought it was a scandal when I saw written in a wreath, 'May the Gates of Heaven Open'—all done in roses, mind you."

Auntie suddenly left her seat and, with astonishing swiftness in one so old, snatched the crumbling flower from her hand before Miss Sillifant guessed her purpose. Then she threw it out of the window.

"Wouldn't you know betther than to do such an awful thing as carry that around with ye, young woman? O these wasteful Prods, with their flowers, when they might be puttin' the money into masses for the dead to save their sowls!"

Aine was aghast. "O Auntie McCool! How could you! If you speak of waste of flowers, I always hated it so when we pulled blossoms to pieces on the first and last days of Our Lady's month and threw them on the church aisles. When I stayed with Aunt Prentiss I belonged to a sodality, and I can remember the church doors being opened and flowers thrown on the street, and the scramble of the little Protestant boys for them. It seemed such a waste—broken, lovely things."

Miss Sillifant's eyes were covered by a very moist handkerchief. "Why did I show it to you? You shouldn't have thrown out my rose! I was alone in

the room with that lady when she died. The nurse had just left her for a sleep. She herself said she would be having a rest. She lay down, and I noticed her queer breathing. I fell on my knees and said the prayer for the dying, and when I looked up she had gone. They were very strict Protestants.

"I had that prayer on my conscience for long and long, and at the time, mind you, if I had had the holy water with me I would have sprinkled it in the room, and she when alive would have said it was a heathenish thing."

Auntie McCool snorted. "Silly infant they call ye, an' no wonder. 'Tis too much ye've been with the Prods intoirely. Hairdressin' takes ye into the quare places, but I can't see why it should make ye stay with the Prod in her last hours. 'Twas good ye said the prayer, but if I'd been in yer shoes I'd have run loike a good wan for the nurse."

"It was but a moment I had, and I dropped on my knees. That rose—don't you see it always seemed to me to be that prayer that maybe saved her soul in dying?"

"Full of fancies that gurrl will be to her dyin' day," said Auntie, coldly critical, quite unmoved by the story. "She shouldn't be hangin' around dyin' Prods, the way she's been doin'. Her ma should be towld of her goin's-on."

Miss Sillifant, in futile anger, brushed Auntie aside as she slammed the door. "How was I to know you had relations like that dreadful woman!" she wailed down

the corridors. Heads appeared like magic at bedroom doors. Aine put up her hand to her own hair; one side marcelled, a thick coil hung over the other shoulder. She fled for her hat and coat.

Then, having pacified Mrs. Plaice, insulted over the uproar in the hall, Aine grasped Auntie firmly by the shoulder and piloted her outside.

It was snowing for the first time that year—a real snow. "The first snow is always the coldest," Auntie maintained, as she shivered a little in her thin wraps. She stood silent for a moment, withdrawn into herself away from the hurrying throngs, and regarded the "attymosphere" with a strange scrutiny. "I hear ye, I hear ye," she mumbled. "It's thick with snow fairies, Janey."

Even so, Aine remembered her on certain dawns, wandering about the farm, waving her arms, menacing things invisible with her uplifted rosary, with its huge beads, like crab-apples.

There were no seats to be had on the train. Auntie stumbled over someone's valise and promptly sat down on it. Later, she fell asleep, her head bent over on her knees. She was a ridiculous figure to some of the passengers, but to Aine she was the Indomitable One, gaining her ends, for herself or for someone else, inevitably. Brave old campaigner, what had she not faced in her raid on the city stronghold, to snatch her from the Jaws of the Boarding-House Christmas!

To the great delight of the passengers who "discovered" her, when she woke from her uneasy slumbers

she was induced to sing one of the songs which she declared should always be sung on Christmas Eve—*Mrs. Fogarty's Christmas Cake*:

> There were plums and prunes and cherries,
> And nuts and candies and cinnamon, too.
> There were caraway seeds in abundance,
> And the crust it was nailed on with glue.
> It would kill a man twice
> If he ate half a slice
> Of Mrs. Fogarty's Christmas Cake!

"It nades the fiddle, av coorse. Me v'ice gives it the go-by on the high notes, I'm thinkin'. But when ye're hungry there's nothin' makes yer mouth wather like that song, whoiver sings it. Och, 'Christmas is comin' an' the goose is gettin' fat.' Faix, an' I wish I had me pipe now. On Christmas Eve, fastin', ould men in the poineer toime would sit and smoke a half-filled pipe, just a puff or two, for it had to be passed round and smoked before the clock struck twelve, to get the 'cure' was in it. They'd sit in the cow-shed, after the Christmas candle had been lighted, an' they was ready for anythin' to happen as they supped their poteen. Shure, those were the great toimes, in the ould days."

The train whistled for the station. "We'll just miss thim, for they'll all be at midnight mass." Aine's heart sank. She loved that service, inextricably bound up with the Christmas celebration. The walk of a mile and a half along drifted roads—somehow it seemed as if she could never reach the farmhouse, empty and unwelcoming.

But at the station a sleigh was waiting. Larry had sent it for them. He was himself at church, said the boy driver, a newcomer in the community. A warm glow melted the frost that had been encircling Aine's heart. Someone had thought of her this Christmas Eve, someone had remembered, besides the faithful old "Auntie."

"Dennis Murphy was drivin' this sleigh last Christmas," said Auntie. "But now he's singin' 'Whillalooya' to the dead nettles."

"Meanin' he's dead, miss," volunteered the driver, with due solemnity.

"There's a stupid lad for ye," exclaimed Auntie, instantly aroused by a display of ignorance. "As if Janey here didn't know what I meant!"

Aine laughed. "When I come to think of it, I don't know just what the nettles have to do with it—'Alleluia,' of course——"

"Ye've forgotten a lot of good sinse ye had when ye were a child. Don't ye moind me tellin' ye that the nettles is where the 'strong' spirits live—thim that because they're strong must stay near the airth? They do be nadin' yer prayers bad."

Aine remembered a plant akin to the "archangel" of which Auntie spoke. "The cursed nettle"—what was the story? That for every blister caused by it a prayer for the dead must be repeated? And through her mind danced a little rhyme she had read somewhere: "He shall have the thornies set in his bed at night." When was it that she used to wake with the

prickles against her bare toes in bed, put there, she was told, by unseen hands? Dirty little pads they were, probably, belonging to one J. H. What a queer old life it was which she had left behind her for ever!

Yet she leaned forward with keen delight to take the full force of the fresh country breeze. It was good to belong to it, good to come home for Christmas. That day meant nothing but heartache to many in the city. It had been commercialised until others fairly dreaded its approach.

Here, it proclaimed itself in every snow-laden pine-tree. She caught at a drifted cedar-bough as she passed it in swift flight, and the starry crystals shone on her hair and eyelashes. "Oh, how lovely that smells—how Christmassy!"

She seemed in a dream, so suddenly had she been transported from her poor little room and thronging streets to this blessed glimpse of white peace.

"There's a crowd dancin' in the Clancy barn," said Auntie as they passed the place in question. "I'll be goin' there mesilf in a little while. I'll have a bit of fun there cuttin' out some young girl in the dance, or tellin' stories that would make yer blood rin could at the fireside *screagh.* Ye won't mind if I lave ye till marnin'?"

"Oh, not a bit. If I wasn't so tired I'd go along with you. What a time it seems since I was at a barn-dance!"

In her mind she saw the clean-swept floor, the lamps hanging on the walls, the shocks of corn for seats; the fiddler in the corner playing *Turkey in the Straw* or

The Old Irish Washerwoman; the master of ceremonies calling out the changes of the Lancers: "Sashay down the centre; swing yer partners." She had once been part of it in a sense—never quite out of it, she thought with a smiling-rueful sigh.

The house, empty though it was, seemed to welcome her with its gleaming candle. Then she was in her old room, very cold, and evidently prepared for her in Auntie's slap-dash way. She looked out of the window on the fields stretching in billowy drifts—the road, at once so familiar and so detested, for all it had promised and withheld through the long years.

Faint singing in the distance—mass was over—they were coming home in gay little parties, those who did not go to the dance; the young people arm-in-arm cutting across the fields to farmhouses waiting to display the family gifts to all who could be induced to come in—"making a night of it," as they would say. Then, in the morning, bed and heavy sleep for the tired revellers. The old people would be off to morning mass; the housewife anchored fast in her kitchen cooking the turkey.

Would she see them to-morrow at all? Well, it did not matter much either way. J. H.—that hobbledehoy youth—must be perplexed these days. As "a lost soul" she would have a peculiar interest for him, yet he would have to tread warily to make his personal inquiries.

Then she thought of Larry, wishing she could see him and thank him for his consideration. In the

vestibule of a dream she met Van, hunting for a little mouse, quite forgetful of her and of Christmas Day in his frantic chase.

Auntie's voice uplifted woke her from fitful slumber.

"It sounds like home. I used to dread the thought of her coming unexpectedly when I was little. Now they've got me wished on them as well. But it's only for a night, good people. I'm going to stay in bed tomorrow and only appear for dinner. You wouldn't grudge a beggar a meal on that day."

Auntie woke her in the morning, with scarcely a sign upon her of the night's revelling. She described with great gusto her encounter with a local belle, whom she had "cut out" as she had threatened in the dance of that character. "The face av her as she seen me hoein' it down loike a good wan with her best young man! They was laffin' all around me to see how I got the betther av her, an' me on me ould laigs that could jig as well as the next wan.

"An' who do ye think had the impidence to come up to me loike a loony an' say, 'Mrs. McCool, cud I have a word with ye?'—That Bradburn lad it was."

Aine's eyes were wide open now. Oh, if she had only gone to the dance as a looker-on!

"That lad is the obstinate wan. I sint him away, an' back he comes like a tormintin' flea. 'Tell me where she is,' he kapes on sayin'. 'Nobody here knows. I came down because I thought someone in the Settlement might tell me.'

"'Well, I sez, an' why wouldn't she be in her own

bed, in her own room at the farrm? Did ye iver think of that?' I sez.

"'So ye won't help me out?' he sez. An' the black look he give me. Then he tuk the thrain to the city or somewhere, but he didn't throuble me agin."

"Auntie, give me a Christmas present," said Aine. Her face was half muffled in the pillows. "If I ever want to marry Van Bradburn—and I know now he wants me to—tell me it won't matter so very much to you."

"Marry a *Prod*?" gasped Auntie. "Ye wouldn't shame me like that! Shure, an' I want to see ye married afore I die, but don't ye give up yer hopes yet. There's a manny foine Catholic fellas will be wantin' ye, take me worrd for ut. That Bradburn lad is fond of ye, I can see that with me eyes shut. But forgit him. Ye are young yet. Let me hear no more av yer nonsinse with his name comin' in firrst an' last."

Then she told her that the Finnigans were all invited out for dinner, and dire offence would be given, she intimated, if she herself did not go. The party was arranged in her honour, she said.

Aine did not dare voice her relief. "There's plenty for yerself—good atin', like the Night of the Big Much. I've seen to it that ye'll have a rale good dinner. And an ould frind sent ye this."

A tiny plum-pudding in its gay tissue covering and red ribbons, and, on a card, in Larry's handwriting: "May I come for dessert?"

After a desperate attempt to "do something" to her

hair—she almost bobbed it—Aine wandered through the eerily quiet rooms, saying good-bye to certain window vistas, to a few cherished objects—attic rubbish now. Then Larry came—for dessert. They shared the tiny pudding, talking eagerly the while.

"Yes," he said, in answer to an inquiry that verged on the subject, "I'm at peace with myself at last, and I'm happy in the day's work of the seminary, and in what I see before me as priest. If one's religion means anything, it means going the whole way. Your message helped me a lot, you know. You were right."

"My message?" she faltered. Father O'Shea had taken things in his own hands, then, and made her speak? Wiser so, perhaps. Still, she would have liked to know just what she had said.

"Why, you know!" He looked at her, surprised. "'He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.'" . .

("Ah," she thought, "if I had accused the dear old man of putting words in my mouth which I did not say, he would have got round it by saying, 'I was just making you quote from the Bible. Sure, and you wouldn't be objecting to that, now?'")

"But, you know, I mustn't come here often," he went on, "not even in holiday time and when you are not here. I've got hold of myself in a way——" He broke off, and after a little pause began again. "You see, I miss you too much. I know, of course, that you've gone for ever, that 'the bird comes back to the nested rafter, but Marjory comes no more.' Do you

know that poem by Roberts? It almost seems as if it had been written about you. Wait, let me read a bit to you that I copied. I have it here in my pocket, but I really know it by heart.

> The pastures miss her; the house without her
> Grows forgotten, and grey and old. . . .
>
> The grey barn-doors in the long wind rattle
> Hour by hour of the long white day.
> The horses fret by the well-filled manger
> Since Marjory went away.
>
> The sheep she fed at the bars await her,
> The milch cows low for her down the lane.
> They long for her light, light hand at the milking,—
> They long for her hand in vain.
>
> The voice of the far-off city called to her.
> Was it long years or an hour ago?
> She went away, with dear eyes weeping,
> To a world she did not know.
>
> The berried pastures, they could not keep her,
> The brook, nor the buttercup-golden hill,
> Nor even the long, long love familiar.—
> The strange voice called her still.
>
> She would not stay for the old home garden:—
> The scarlet poppy, the mignonette,
> The foxglove bell and the kind-eyed pansy,
> Their hearts will not forget.
>
> Oh, that her feet had not forgotten
> The woodland country, the homeward way!
> Oh, to look out of the sad, bright window
> And see her come back, some day."
>
> From *Marjory* by Charles G. D. Roberts
> (Messrs. L. C. Page & Co., Boston).

"Don't!" said Aine. "I've felt that so often in the city, with a real sickness at heart—my flowers that must miss me, and the horses and old Rover. But I can never come back. I'm glad the country belonged to me as a child—it will always be a part of me. I come 'home' to it if I have no other home. It's the people who are so cruel, so gossiping. They make life for some of us unbearable: why, a young widow here might as well have been born in India in suttee times. In the city no one bothers about you in that way—well, in some boarding-houses, perhaps—but you can always live much your own life, and feel free.

"I won't be lonesome any more, I think. Something new has come into my life, and I want you to be glad with me."

"You mean you're going to marry Van Bradburn?"

"Well, he hasn't asked me yet," and a demure smile dimpled her face. "But since last night I know that he wants me. Auntie is a great old match-maker, but she would be horrified if she knew what she did."

"You're taking a chance, of course—a mixed marriage, you know." Larry's voice was toneless. "But I'd trust you to make a success of it if anyone could, and I do want you to be happy. You'd tackle anything, I think."

Aine laughed. "Sounds as if you thought Van rather formidable. Yes, I'd chance anything except being a red-headed girl in the Settlement. You've always been so dear and thoughtful, Larry—ever since we

were children together. You were the only one who ever cared—until now."

"Thoughtful?" He put his head down on folded arms.

Aine walked over to the window and looked out unseeingly.

But presently she became aware of a stocky, lunging figure in the distance. He seemed to be having difficulties with new snow-shoes. His clumsy, jerky arms waved to her like danger signals. She cried excitedly: "The Philistines are upon us, Larry! Let's go to the station and take the short-cut through the bush."

When the Finnigans came home Aine was gone. But at the table there were two gossiping little plates. Auntie swept them together with a mighty clash before the Finnigan eye had really surveyed them. "Janey an' me had a plum-puddin' last night after yez all went to bed, an' it give her the nightmare. She should have washed thim plates when she had her dinner. She was always thot careless."

"Where did ye lay yer hand on a plum-puddin' yistiddy?" asked Mrs. Finnigan suspiciously.

"In town, av coorse. They do be growin' there on ivery bush."

In lamentable remembrance those plates loomed up in Aine's vision as her train neared the city. But for a moment only they vexed her consciousness. Her mind was full of a belated Christmas card which she would send at once. It should bear her name only, and

"42 Wendover Street—Sundays preferred." He might come even before Sunday. And that was only two days distant.

How could she know of the yawning crack in the floor of the Bradburn vestibule, beneath the slit where the letters fell?

Miss Cordelia, the maiden-aunt who kept house for the Bradburns, caught sight of a white corner and she and the postman and the maid spent half an hour trying to hook it up with a piece of bent wire. Its loss was a perpetual worry to her. It might have been an unexpected legacy! Had she known that the missive was to depose her as housekeeper! . . .

"WE PLUCKED THIS FLOWER, SAFETY"

SOMEONE was badly needed as rescuer, in Letty's opinion. She had suffered no ill effects in the love affair of Van, her brother, and Beatrice, but the hunt for one Aine Finnigan was getting on her nerves. At sixteen one may be romantic, but other people's romances pall after a time. Moody and absent-minded, Van was no good to himself or anyone else. He took mysterious trips to unknown destinations, he talked to "queer" visitors.

In one of his vain searches, by an odd coincidence, he saw Jim in a waiting taxi. The obsession that held him in its grip sent him at once to the curb—not to express delight at seeing an old acquaintance long dropped out of all knowledge. No. His one overmastering thought was: "There's Jim—does he know what's become of Aine?"

But Jim was a broken reed; a chastened creature, broken by the city which he hated. His one desire was to get back to the country again, where he "was his own boss": he was sick for news of home. But pride, of course, stood like a lion in the path.

He knew nothing of Aine, and said so. But a flame of moody curiosity was evident in his quick gesture: "What do you want of her now?"

"I want her to marry me, if she will."

"She won't, then," he said shortly. "You'd better look for her in a convent, she's not the marrying kind. What makes you think she'd marry you, and all against it at home?"

"She's left her home for good," said Van. "Why shouldn't she come to me? If I only knew what had become of her!"

"It's the cursed city." Jim shook himself restlessly. "We'd both of us be happy somewhere, and she keeping house for me. We always got on well."

The two men eyed each other for a moment. "She'll never go back to you; help me to find her," Van pleaded.

The other, slumped in his seat, bored to death with his aimless existence, made no reply. And Van left him, with the old aching fear in his heart. Even Jim did not know where she was.

"Trying to find that girl still?" Letty demanded, when his lack of interest in life was more apparent than ever, and all her sallies failed to rouse him. "You might as well give her up. If she cared for you she would have relented long ago. She's probably married to someone else by now. I remember her—yes, I met her once at the Prentiss's boarding-house. I'd know her if I saw her because of her hair, unless she's bobbed it, or dyed it, for disguise."

"Oh, she wouldn't think I was looking for her," he said in a hopeless tone. "It would never occur to her that anyone was in love with her unless they told her

in so many words. I didn't know how I felt myself until Beatrice was so hard on her. I could hardly believe my ears when she said those things about her. My blood fairly boiled. I made an awful scene, I'm afraid. And I thought I'd see Aine next day! But I've told you all this long ago."

"A good many times! But never mind, Van. I'll bring my acute scientific mind to bear on this problem. First thing you know I'll find her myself. Did you ever think she might be a nurse in a hospital, or a manicure lady, or a waitress?"

"Ordered around in a restaurant! Oh, don't make me lose my senses! Sometimes I've thought I'd find her sitting under the trees in the park, looking after children. She was always so fond of them."

"Most likely she's a shop-girl, or cashier."

"In a flower-store? She might do that, I know. But I've gone into so many shops, and she was never there."

Later in the afternoon, Letty, tired with equally fruitless efforts, sat down at a table in the Three-way Lodge and ordered a sundae. She casually glanced at the waitress—it had become a habit now—and suddenly her lassitude departed. Where had she seen such hair before? She studied the flitting figure closely, but could not get a glimpse of her face; supposing it were Aine it would all end as a story-book should. Sitting there in a brown study Letty enjoyed evolving her plan of attack. Then she rose, breathless with

excitement, and joined a group of people leaving. She brushed by the fair-haired waitress, calling out clearly as she passed: "Why, there's Van Bradburn!"

The tray fell with a crash. Leaving Aine almost in tears among the broken china, Letty departed, highly elated with her ruse and bursting with impatience to get home.

"But let's have dinner first," she pleaded desperately with her brother. "I'm *hungry*. And she'll have gone home by now."

All to no avail. Back she had to go on the instant. As they got to the Lodge, Aine was boarding a street-car. Van ran for it, swung on before the door slammed, and Letty's last glimpse of him quite thrilled her. He had fought his way to her, touched her on the shoulder; they were hanging on the same strap. Aine looked as if she were going to topple backward, and a curve in the rails nobly swept her in the proper direction. She fell into his arms.

It was not such easy going as all that, as Van soon discovered. Aine was very proud, and just because she knew what she knew about herself and her own feelings she fenced herself around by denials and interminable discussions over differences of faith. Yet it was not all pride, but the happy sense of her own power to charm and hold him—in this new relation of importunate lover and doubting woman—that made her so "difficult."

To her astonishment, she found that, while he was mystified, he thoroughly believed that she had suddenly developed scruples on the subject of mixed marriages. Up to this time he had rather taken it for granted that nothing of the sort would prove an obstacle. She was surprised to find herself so convincing, and immediately began to think of new arguments. For her, indeed, it was something of a delightful little game.

"But couples like ourselves marry every day and the heavens don't fall! What about a fellow I heard of who turned Buddhist *after* he had married, and left his Presbyterian wife high and dry! . . I can't understand you, Aine!"

They never discussed Beatrice. For, on the first evening of explanations, he had said: "I proposed to the wrong girl, that is all there is about it. You understand that as well as I do. She does not matter to either of us."

"When are you going to marry me, Aine?"

They had gone for a drive on a day which should have precluded all argument, into a countryside he knew, quiet and deserted. In the summer a throng of visitors assembled there, but now they had its mellow beauty to themselves. They went to the churchyard by the lake—haunt immemorial of country lovers on Sundays—and there, seated on the stile, Van strove to force Aine to commit herself to some definite promise. He did not understand, sympathetic as he was by

nature, that she was seeking to enjoy her respite from all cares—that she wanted to be happy in her present; she had had so little of what youth longs for, and is so often utterly denied.

The breath of the late summer day was strangely languorous, enervating. Evading his importunity, as usual, Aine rose and passed under an arched gate of cedar-trees, bent and twined together. Clipped and tended as when an English gardener first nursed the growth, it made a strange contrast to the general roughness of the cemetery, as evidenced in the blackberry-brambles on the crumbling stone walls, and in the wild moss-pink and live-for-ever straggling over neglected graves.

Van followed her into the arch. "When I was a boy someone taught me a rhyme about this place," he said.

> "A sprig of cedar in your hand
> When underneath this arch you stand,
> Will grant your wish on some fine day.
> But never throw the sprig away."

He broke off a leaf and thrust another in her hand.

"I wish you would marry me," he pleaded.

"I wish I could," she answered.

"Mark my words, for '*They* will bring it to pass,' as your old Irishwomen were always muttering. Did you remember that was the Wishing-Arch? Now it's got to come true."

"It's no good if the wish is said aloud. Anyway, I know you made up that rhyme. Do you remember the

nonsense verses you used to make up for me when I was at the Prentiss's house?—

> Little Jean, once so stout,
> Turned inside out
> And now she's lean.

You had a real gift for that sort of thing."

Laughing, "I had forgotten that," he stooped to read a stone defaced by mould: 'Deodaimia, beloved daughter of Nancy Patch.' No wonder she wanted to give the child a fancy name! If you think I'm so good at verses—and I had forgotten how good I was! —I had better write my own epitaph:

> Here lies a very stupid zany,
> Who tried his best to marry Ainey,
> But growing old in the endeavour
> He died; and then she thought him clever.

"It's fatal to have a reputation for light-mindedness; makes me think of a man I knew who had deep creases in his cheeks which made him always look as if he were laughing; no one was ever known to take anything he said seriously. Fooling is all right for a time——"

He broke off moodily. "You said you wanted to add to your collection of epitaphs; why don't you hunt for some? I'm not inclined that way, I find. Think of wasting our lovely day like this!"

A memory of Larry, baffled, brooding on a stone wall, flashed over Aine, as she furtively glanced at Van's shadowed face. But she, in her turn, brushed away long grasses and moss.

"Why, here's one, right at my feet—

Poor child, her days on earth were few,
She passed away like morning dew."

Seventeen when she died! The words clutched at her heart, in a sudden panic. How brief one's hold on life and love!

Aine looked at Van soberly as he wandered about disconsolately. Then she called to him: "Listen to this one:

Husband, adieu I bid to you.
While life did last our love was true.
Now I am gone, no sorrow take,
But love my children for my sake."

He came close to her. "Read it aloud."

She began: "Husband——"

"Say it again!" he broke in.

Then they looked into each other's eyes and the veiling laughter drifted away. Something that lay deep in her heart trembled in her voice as she said: "That's a dear epitaph, that one . . . don't you think? 'Now I am gone, no sorrow take . . .'"

"Silly little Aine! Let us take our joy while we may You have made us lose so much of it already."

"But what about Auntie?" Faintly her protest was heard, a whisper, as she drew away at last from his caress.

"Oh, we'll go down to the farm to-morrow and tell her we're going to be married next day!"

They both laughed. But that was what they did in the end.

Mrs. Finnigan, left desolate all these months (for you really could not call J. H. an asset in that family), had come to the conclusion that Auntie McCool as usual must be sent for, this time to take up permanent abode. But Auntie's thoughts and hopes had always revolved around Aine—there was no inducement that could be offered, it seemed, at first, to make her stay all the time with Bridget Jim.

In the end, however, curiosity conquered. She came "on a visit" and stayed, mostly in triumph. For Mrs. Finnigan was worn out and broken. Auntie summarily disposed of J. H. by sending him to a business college in a nearby town; she secured occasional help as needed or, more truthfully, as it could be got; rented most of the farm acres, and altogether became a new woman: "her eye was not dim, nor her natural force abated."

Violent quarrels there were at times over the exact reason for the departure of Aine and Jim, but on the whole the two got on amicably enough, as might have been expected when Mrs. McCool had practically a free hand. But there were occasional explosions. After some months Auntie's magnificent health began to show signs of weakening, for she worked very hard. One day she complained about the size of the huge farm kitchen.

"It takes too many shteps for me ould laigs. Faix, an' I wish I had Ma's ould kitchen in Oireland. The landlord there built her a new wan about two by four, no less and no more. An' the praste come to

ask her how she liked ut. There had been talk enough about ut for years—iverywan in the place had heard of ut. An' she sez: 'Ut's that small, yer riverince. Come in and see for yersilf if a donkey could turn in ut.'"

Mrs. Finnigan sniffed. "That sounds like yer ma, all right. I've heard tales of her sayin's. The poor *onshuk*!"

They met Auntie at the farm gate. She looked as if she had been waiting for them for a long time.

Aine was much bolder than she had thought possible.

"Van's come, you see, Auntie. And he wants me to go back to the city and marry him. . . . Yes, by the next train. But I said I must see you first, to tell you—that maybe I would, before long. A month or so, maybe, or a year. . . ."

Mrs. McCool was staring fixedly at Van. The unfortunate youth was hopelessly unequal to the encounter. "How did you like your teeth, Mrs. McCool? Do they fit all right now?" Ass that he was! He had never intended so much as to mention them. He had long ago mentally wiped both bill and experience off his books. Still, she needn't have glowered at him so. It was a kindly and natural inquiry, surely. But she was a dragon, if you like.

"Me teeth have been ornamentin' the windy-sill, young man, most of the toime since ye trated me for thim. But they're in me mouth now, as ye cud see by the way I cut me worrds so short. And now they are

out av ut! Pick thim up and kape thim for me, if ye dare."

Snatching them, she threw them violently down. They settled at Van's feet, and seemed to plead for protection from further outrage. Had she challenged him, funny old thing? He picked them up gingerly and put them in his pocket.

"That's what you might call pocketing your pride," he thought, with his usual detached vision of himself, as a highly ludicrous object. Auntie, from a distance, regarded him balefully.

Aine's gaze had followed her apprehensively. Now, turning at a muffled sound, she looked accusingly at Van. Could it be that he was laughing? Of course Auntie was funny, but . . .

"Aine, 'darlint,'" said the incorrigible one, "forgive me, but I've been thinking of the story of the dentist who had an angry victim: 'Not only did she not pay me, but she gnashed upon me with my own teeth.'"

Aine giggled hysterically.

"Come here at wanst, the two av yez," Auntie commanded. They followed her slowly as she led the way to the house. Well, it had got to be done—nowadays no one put you in prison for asking a girl to marry you.

"What does it matter if he doesn't believe just as I do?" Aine thought, with sudden blinding tears. Vaguely, Auntie seemed to be defending her against something, a shadowy, threatened danger to her happiness.

"I'll break ut to Mrs. Finnigan," said Auntie shortly.

"Give me thim teeth this minnut and don't pretend ye don't know where they are. She'll miss the click if she don't hear ut on me gooms. . . . Janey, supposin' I give ye yer way for wanst, will ye promise that if ye git married the childher will be Catholics? What patent-religion is he, annyhow?"

Aine hid her face in his coat collar. "Van!"

"I can't speak for them, Mrs. McCool," he began bravely. "But—but Aine can settle all that later, eh? I don't mind *what* they are!"

(Good heavens, these Catholics were queer and stubborn things! But of course Aine wasn't like that.)

Auntie stalked majestically before him, in blurred vision. There was something paralysing in her measured steps. He followed meekly, feeling as if she were embodied Doom.

"Sit down in the parlour till *I* do the settlin'. And don't be givin' me anny more of yer gab, young man. That's enough for yez. If ye should hear annythin' strange in the kitchen, look out of the windy and see what ut is. Ut might be in the front yarrd."

It seemed to be in the kitchen: and they gathered that Auntie had her back to the door. "Let me at him, the black-hearted villun!" came once to their ears. Then, a stormy murmur rising and falling.

Auntie took the bull by the horns, naturally.

"Well, that's the childher settled and done for, glory be to God."

"Ye'll be meanin' that snip of a man and that young

runnygade of an Aine, that afther she's married should be standin' before the congregation in church with a sheet over her head, doin' penance, like Clara——"

"Penance, is ut? She'll have penance enough livin' with his family. But as for bein' married, 'twill be in the Presbytery if I can get the ear of the praste, an' begorra 'twill be the worrse for him if he don't listen. Nor I won't niver have her as a spectykill bein' married at the foot of the church, an' that young man wouldn't stand for ut nayther, I'm thinkin'. No: answerin' yer question in black an' white, I mane the b'yes an' gurrls that Janey may have wan of these days—twins it may be, or thriplets, 'tis all wan in the end. They'll be good *Catholics*. He's promised ut."

"'Tis a desateful woman y'are. As bad in me breast as thistles set in the bed at night. Takin' Aine's part like that!"

"A happy woman I am when I find nettles in me bed, as well ye know. It manes that *They* are fond av ye."

"And him not even Irish!"

"Wud ye want him to be an Orangeman? There's worse people nor the Amurricans. I belave he goes to church—sometimes. A *Sienty*, he calls himself, I'm towld."

"What's that, then?" Mrs. Finnigan demanded.

"Shure an' it's not what ye call a Prod, I'm thinkin'. He's got some charrm or other, he says, or so Aine towld me wance, that kapes him good-timpered and well and *lucky*."

"You don't say!" cried Mrs. Finnigan, greatly impressed. "Does he sell it?"

"Maybe he'll give ut to Janey," said Auntie hopefully. She was elated over her handling of the conversation.

But her opponent looked dashed. "Probably there wouldn't be enough to go round. Where are they now? I've got to see them and speak me mind. Let me pass, woman!"

"They're coolin' their heels beyant there, somewhere. He's mortial afeard of me and I'll see that he kapes that way."

Mrs. Finnigan snorted. "And you not to be knowing that yer own Janey can do what she likes with you—and I'll bet she's gone off with him now."

She flung the door wide. The room was empty.

Auntie hastened to the open window, which overlooked a little ravine. "'Tis a rale good jump. But Janey was always soople as a cat. He *was afeard* of me!" she murmured triumphantly to herself.

"A poor-sperrited man, no doubt," said Mrs. Finnigan, whose sharp ears caught the words. The delicate sarcasm was lost on Auntie.

"'Tis the surest way out av a scrape, the windy," she retorted. But it was not in her best manner. She sat down heavily in a convenient chair and fumbled for a handkerchief.

"O wisha, wisha, Janey's afther lavin' ould Auntie!"

"Have done with that now." Mrs. Finnigan was

mercifully stern. "Wan would think you was at a wake and you was her mother."

But Mrs. Finnigan herself had by no means given up the fight. She had one weapon still, unknown to Auntie. For all these years she had kept a secret. But she could restrain her tongue no longer.

She ran in the direction of the station, with frequent stops for breath, for she was soon winded, but the fire in her heart only blazed the higher. There was still half an hour before the train coming from Inwood, bound for Toronto, would arrive. Yes, there they were, the two of them, pacing up and down the platform. Van came forward to meet her.

"Go out of sight, Aine, for a minute, will you, dear? I'll deal with Mrs. Finnigan." But Aine was still in hearing when the storm burst. The words came in a torrent.

"So you would marry Aine, would you? And under what name, I would like to know? She has no right to be called Finnigan and I won't have her disgrace a good family. Her father was a Finnigan right enough —brother to my own husband—but her mother? Who was her mother? A half-crazed creature, wandering up and down the fields of a town fifty miles away—an English girl. And Desmond Finnigan would have married her right enough—when it was too late—and would have brought her to my house. I said: 'I'll take the baby, but you keep that woman away from the place or it will be the worse for her.' And he did, though she got away once and dragged the child off for a day."

Van took her firmly by the arm.

"Mrs. Finnigan, just listen to me. I don't care *who* Aine's father or mother were, do you hear? She's going to marry me to-day or to-morrow. You were good to her in your own way all those years and I'm sorry to see you so upset about it all. But you can spare your breath. . . . Aine! The train's coming."

Aine had seen her mother in her rages too often to be greatly disturbed by the scene. Fortunately there were no onlookers. Van had always known there was something of a mystery in her life, naturally he must have wondered, but they had never discussed it; and except for the very real and terrible feeling that no one "belonged" to her save Auntie McCool, the circumstances surrounding her birth had ceased to matter long before. She had many unknown sisters and brothers, innocent sufferers, in the same plight.

Mrs. Finnigan was suddenly very tired. She sat down on a truck, her rage spent, despair in her heart. She had betrayed the secret shared with Father John. Once before, with Larry, under stress of emotion, she had almost divulged it. But neither of her hearers seemed to care.

Aine's mother was dead long ago; handsome Desmond, whom she had loved in secret, unrequited fashion, had not been heard of for many years. She felt very old, very tired—how little Life left one, after all! And then she saw Jim.

He had alighted from the train coming from Inwood. Rushing up to her he kissed her, and threw an arm

around her bent shoulders. "Oh, you've changed so! I should never have left you."

"Ye came back, ye came back!" She burst into tears.

"Was that Aine I saw on the train?" he asked, after an interval.

"Ye're all alike, ye men. It's Aine comes into everything. She's gone. She's gettin' married, bad wind to her! But she may go for all of me—since I've got you."

EPILOGUE

"A WARM WOMAN"

SHE was a picture in her quaint black bonnet, her cheeks still high-coloured, a quizzical gleam still lighting the shrewd old eyes. At her end of the street-car there was suddenly much noise and laughter as a bearded, rough-looking old farmer seized her by the hand and shook it for several minutes.

"Why, it's you, Mrs. McCool!" said he. "It's long since I set eyes on you, since you left these parts. And you're bound the right way this minute. Why don't you come out and see us? Sure, and the country is far nicer than the town already, and we'll have green peas for ye before long. Are ye goin' to have a luk at your tidy little property, by chance, now? Iverything's goin' up, ye mind, and don't ye let it go, but stay with it. Why, the railway——"

The old lady, who had been trying unavailingly to get in a word for herself, here took up the direction of things. You could see that she was accustomed to do so anyway, give her but fair chance.

"The railway, do ye say? I won't have ut comin' through me! I won't have ut!" Her hands were trembling at the bare thought of it, and the farmer hastened to reassure her.

"Why, it isn't goin' through at all, woman! It's a long way off from your place. But if it was near, it would raise values a lot. Don't you see it would? 'Tis the very thing your place needs."

"How near is ut?" she said in an ominously quiet voice.

"Well, it might be within half a mile or so."

"Is ut annywhere near the crick? Is ut by me hayricks? Is ut south or west or wheriver, me man? *Will* ye tell me with no more worrds where ut is this minnut? A quarter of a mile away? Then ut is goin' through me."

The farmer's companion, who had been doing his best to mystify Mrs. McCool, as far as directions went, here interrupted:

"You'll be well fixed yet, Mrs. McCool, but the railway's not too near for your comfort. But when it is we'll all be makin' up to you, for 'tis the warm woman you'll be. A tidy bit, that. I always liked the place."

"There's a manny plaguin' me to sell ut," said Black Bonnet, accepting composedly her dues. "But I've rented ut for four years. I liked the place in summer an' ye moind I lived there two years by me lone, but I couldn't stand ut no more. And annyway me relations was allays turnin' up. An' I didn't loike thim."

She laughed, as if at a well-understood allusion, and one of the men leaned forward, laughing and slapping his thighs.

"Fine we know that, none better. Do ye mind the

fine frosty mornin' when I come by your place with a load of wood? I laughed all the way home."

"'Twas their day for fightin'," she countered. But her eyes were twinkling at the remembrance.

"'Twas the widdy Donovan was the worrst wan for comin' widout a bid an' stayin' as long as I could put up with her—an' longer nor thot. But the mushrooms wan hot day finished her——"

"Was she poisoned, then?" gasped the farmer, leaning forward eagerly.

"She was not. Ye see, me niece Janey is married to a grand fella, a dintist, an' well fixed he is. 'Twas they bought me ould farrm back an' giv ut to me. He was spindin' the day helpin' with the gyarden when who should be afther comin' but the widdy in a cyar wid some of her relations. So I made up me moind quick an' sez to her: ''Tis sorry I am I can't ask ye in, but I've a power of worrk on me hands, for I'm goin' into town with Janey's husband here.'

"'We'll wait outside for a bit,' she sez. 'We're in no hurry at all, at all,' she sez.

"So I wint in and got me ould straw hat and wint into the bush by the back way to gather mushrooms for Van's supper. They're tasty things if ye loike thim, but for mesilf I can ate slugs and worrms by thimsilves when I want thim.

"So Mr. Van he waits an hour or so, and thin goes into the house and calls me high an' low, an' he comes out and sez to the widdy: ''Tis rale vexed I am to tell ye that Auntie is overcome by the heat an' she tould

me to say she must lie down and kape quiet wid a wet towel round her head an' no talkin' outside until it's toime for the thrain to the city, which is due very soon.'

"The widdy made for the dure—there's not manny gets the best av her—but he held her off very firm and he sez: 'Sit ye down in the cyar now quiet an' I'll make ye a cup of tay and bring ut out.' An' as brazen as brass I come up to the front dure wid me skirts kilted up, carryin' me mushrooms, worrms an' all, an' she saw me back an' no more as I climbed the steps. An' she began to cry, an' sez to Van: 'I'll be lavin' this minnut. 'Tis the heart-scald I have wid the insult ye put on me this day! May sorrow mend ye!' An' she druv off.

"Van makes a funny face and says: 'Ye've quared me, Auntie, for sure.'

"'Foine enough yer story was,' I sez. 'I hated to shpoil ut; a rale credit to ye. But ut wouldn't have kep' out the widdy Donovan afther she'd drunk her tay.'"

"I'll say it wouldn't," said the Bearded One. "I had the dead spit of her up in coort wance for lookin' in at me as I sat atin' with the curtings drawn. I can't help it that I'm a widower. They're all after me.

"Ye're not lookin' quite yourself," he went on sympathetically, eyeing her with a critical air. "I'm thinkin' town life don't agree with ye. Ye'd best come back to the old ways, so as ye can enjoy your money when ye get it."

She tossed her head. "Town suits me all roight, but I had the 'flu' this winter; ye have thot in the country, too, ye moind. A bad case I had, but I tuk whisky ivery hour for three days. The doctor says: 'Mrs. McCool, ye have the rale roight idee and I'd loike to be wan av yer pashunts. But, woman dear, where did ye get the good stuff?'"

She cackled aloud at the reminiscence. "Foine I knew where to get ut."

A sudden significant look passed between the two men.

"Are ye on your way to your old home now?"

"I am thot. The tenants is away and I have an attic I loike to look in on now and then to see if there's a little jam-pot left I stowed away there."

The farmer gave her a delighted dig in the ribs. "Mrs. McCool, 'tis the swate tooth I have, too."

"Come along thin, the both av ye. And as to me property niver fear. I know what I'm about as well as the next wan."

The flurry in real estate on the street-car had not heightened the colour in her withered cheeks, but her tread on the wooden sidewalk held a swagger in it. She saw herself "a warm woman."

And a gay little party of three, hilarious in anticipation, stepped it out briskly over the slush of the fields that led to the little jam-pot in Mrs. McCool's attic.

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